Campione! Volume 10

source : http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Campione!:Volume_10

These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 10".

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂
高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ
《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理
霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール
《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

清秋院恵那
当代随一とされる「太刀の媛巫女」。
護堂の「剣」として侍る。

アレクサンドル・ガスコイン
黒王子の異名を有する魔王。

アリス・ルイーズ・オブ・ナヴァール
グリニッジ賢人議会前議長。白き姫。

グィネヴィア
神祖の女王。

ランスロット・デュ・ラック
湖の騎士。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

槍の戦神
カンピオーネ！
丈月 城
Campione X
Illustration シコルスキー
スーパーダッシュ

た 9-10

カンピオーネ！ X 槍の戦神

丈月 城

集英社スーパーダッシュ文庫

ISBN978-4-08-630623-2
C0193 ¥629E
9784086306232
1920193006292
定価 本体629円＋税

草薙護堂は神殺しである。

アテナとの別れを経て、湖の騎士・ランスロットとの再戦に備える護堂だったが、謎の女性との出会いをきっかけに、神祖・グィネヴィアと共闘を強いられることに。当然、彼女を仇敵と定める神殺し・黒王子アレクとの対立が避けられるはずもなく、神殺しが相撃つ激闘が始まってしまう！　一方、護堂と引き離されたエリカたちは…!?

Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城
我が家の愛犬（ヨークシャー・テリア、♂）は、
朝になると僕の隣で寝ていることが多いのですが、
ときどき僕の上でマウントポジションを取って、
ボディプレスや頭突きを繰りだしてきます。

シコルスキー
神奈川県在住のイラストレーター。
ライトノベルの挿絵を中心に活動させてもらってます。
愛読書は『三銃士』『夜間飛行』『自省録』
『対比列伝』『ファウンデーション』『人形つかい』など。

スーパーダッシュ文庫　丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！　神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！　Ⅱ　魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！　Ⅲ　はじまりの物語
カンピオーネ！　Ⅳ　英雄と王
カンピオーネ！　Ⅴ　剣の巫女
カンピオーネ！　Ⅵ　神山飛鳳
カンピオーネ！　Ⅶ　斉天大聖
カンピオーネ！　Ⅷ　受難の魔王たち
カンピオーネ！　Ⅸ　女神再び
カンピオーネ！　Ⅹ　槍の戦神

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）
高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ
《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆり）
霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール
《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

清秋院恵那（せいしゅういんえな）
当代随一とされる「太刀の媛巫女」。
護堂の「剣」として侍る。

アレクサンドル・ガスコイン
黒王子の異名を有する魔王。

アリス・ルイーズ・オブ・ナヴァール

スーパーダッシュ文庫11周年記念!!

作品のアンケートに答えて
本作品のイラストダウンロード!
&特製『ベン・トー』図書カード 500円分
合計2ヶ月100名プレゼント!
締切:2011年9月20日(火)

待受イラスト
図書カード

※デザインはイメージです。

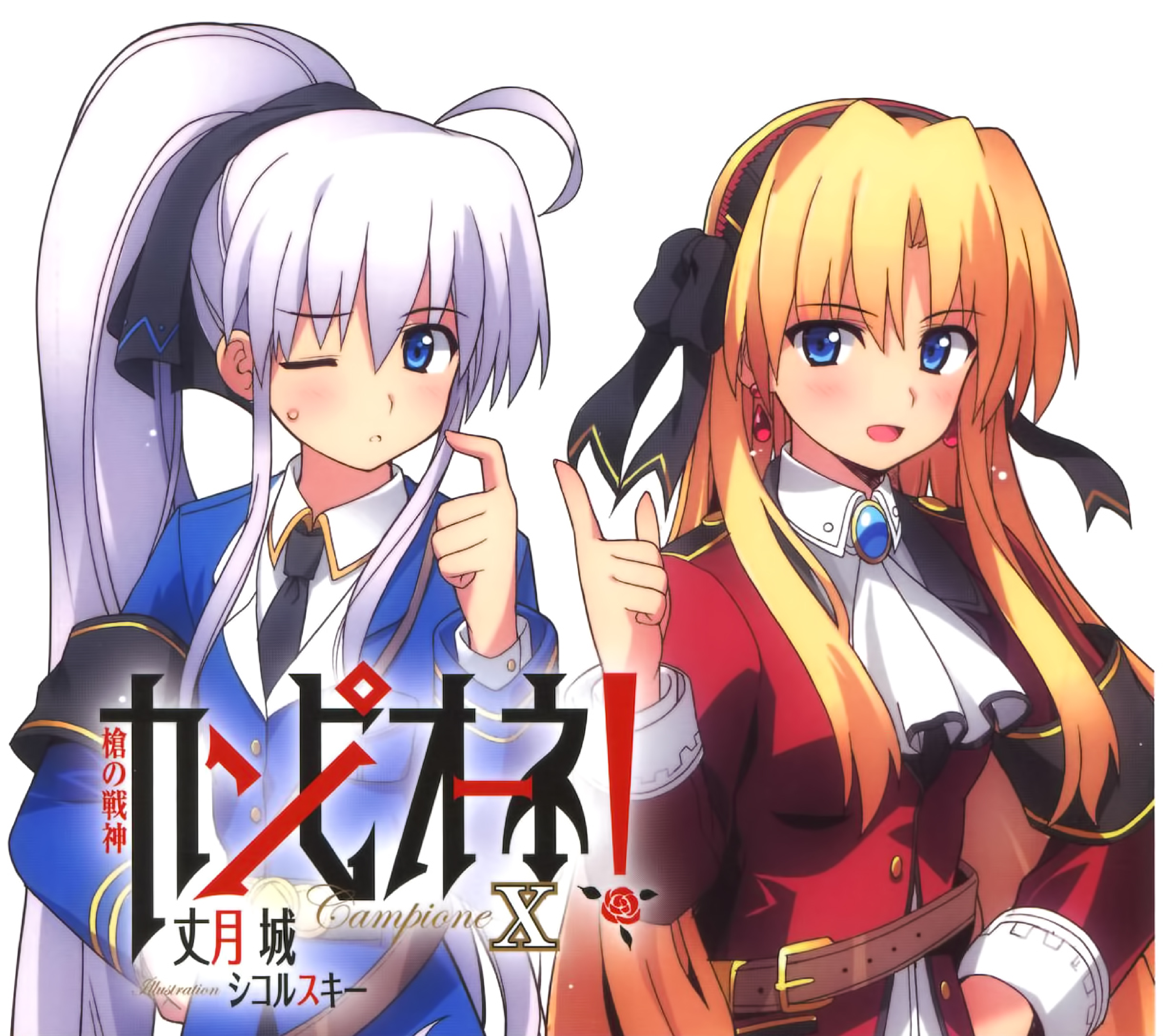
アクセス方法
★QRコードを読み込み、記載されたメールアドレスに空メール（件名・本文に何も記載しないで下さい）を送信して下さい。QR コードが読み込めない場合は、記載のメールアドレスを直接ご入力し、空メールを送信してください。
★ドメイン指定受信可否設定をされている方は「req.jp」と「dml.jp」からの受信ができるように設定して下さい。

注意事項 ※回答・待受ダウンロードは各作品1回のみです。途中で接続が遮断されると無効になる場合がございますので、電波状況の良い場所でご利用下さい。※パケット代等の通信料がかかります。※図書カードの当選発表は賞品の発送をもってかえさせていただきます。賞品の発送は応募締切より一ヶ月前後の予定です。※登録された個人情報は厳重に管理し、本企画以外に利用することはありません。※QR コードは、株式会社デンソーウェーブの登録商標です。

dash-12@req.jp

お問い合わせ：ディーエムエル（TEL 03-3515-2327 平日10時～18時のみ）

カンピオーネ! X 槍の戦神



カンピオーネ!
槍の戦神
Campione X

丈月 城
Illustration シコルスキー

神殺しは呪縛される——!

護堂が囚われた呪いとは？ 黒き貴公子との対決の時が迫る!!

漫画化決定!!
詳細は「ジャンプSQ.」10月特大号（9月3日発売）別冊付録「SDMP」をチェック!!

スーパーダッシュ文庫
定価660円
本体629円

た 9-10

カンピオーネ! X 槍の戦神

丈月 城

スーパーダッシュ文庫
集英社

9784086306232
1920193006292

ISBN978-4-08-630623-2
C0193 ¥629E
定価 本体629円+税

草薙護堂は神殺しである。

アテナとの別れを経て、湖の騎士・ランスロットとの再戦に備える護堂（ごどう）だったが、謎の女性との出会いをきっかけに、神祖・グィネヴィアと共闘を強いられることに。当然、彼女を仇敵と定める神殺し・黒王子アレクとの対立が避けられるはずもなく、神殺しが相撃つ激闘が始まってしまう！ 一方、護堂と引き離されたエリカたちは…!?

D今秋、新創刊!!
スーパーダッシュ文庫発メディアミックスコミック誌!!

SUPERDASH MANGA PROGRAM
SDMP
スーパーダッシュ漫画プログラム
mission5
待望の漫画化!
表紙はシコルスキー描き下ろし!

スーパーダッシュ文庫 漫画化任務遂行中!
ジャンプSQ. 別冊付録で新たに誕生!
ヒット作が続々コミカライズ!

カンピオーネ! 大特集
『カンピオーネ! 予告編』
漫画／坂本次郎 原作／丈月城 キャラクター原案／シコルスキー
『カンピオーネ! ぐらっちぇ』
漫画／ぽんかん⑧ 原作／丈月城 キャラクター原案／シコルスキー

大人気連載クライマックス!
アニメ情報も満載!
『ベン・トー zero Road to witch』第5食

ジャンプSQ. 10月特大号9月3日発売!

Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城（たけづきじょう）
我が家の愛犬(ヨークシャー・テリア、♂)は、
朝になると僕の隣で寝ていることが多いのですが、
ときどき僕の上でマウントポジションを取って、
ボディプレスや頭突きを繰りだしてきます。

シコルスキー
神奈川県在住のイラストレーター。
ライトノベルの挿絵を中心に活動させてもらってます。
愛読書は『三銃士』『夜間飛行』『自省録』
『対比列伝』『ファウンデーション』『人形つかい』など。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 **丈月 城の本**

カンピオーネ! 神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ! II 魔王来臨

8月の新刊・大好評発売中!!

カンピオーネ! X 槍の戦神 丈月 城 イラスト／シコルスキー
オーディナリー・ワールド 2F 槙岡きあん イラスト／KL
百合×薔薇 2 失敗ハーレム 伊藤ヒロ イラスト／高見明男
はるかかなたの年代記 3 夜魔が踊る 白川敏行 イラスト／ふゆの春秋
白翼のリンケージ NEW! 赤井紅介 イラスト／Isll
姉鬼あんりみてっど 2 姉、ところにより鬼巫女注意報 会川 潮 イラスト／馨。
六花の勇者 NEW! 山形石雄 イラスト／宮城
迷い猫オーバーラン! 10 ……護る? 松 智洋 イラスト／ヤス

丈月城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

槍の戦神

Campione X

Contents

目次

序章 11

第1章 くすぶる魔王たち 17

第2章 英国魔王事情 60

第3章 二王、あいまみえる 103

第4章 護堂失墜 147

第5章 黒王子対草薙護堂 181

第6章 運命の島へ 229

第7章 旅の終わり 271

終章 323

アレク
セシリア
グィネヴィア
護堂
？？？
リリアナ
祐理
エリカ

いきなり少女が振り向き、護堂と視線が合った。

彼女は微笑した。

草原を渡る風に光がまじるように笑い、

こちらへ歩いてくる。

「やっと見つけたぞ。

私の運命よ」

透明感のある美貌に似合いの涼やかな声で、

美少女はささやいた。

丈月城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

Campione X

槍の戦神

Prologue

In terms of human history, it happened towards the end of the fifth century.

A time when human faith was still honest and unsophisticated. A time when the relationship between humans and [Heretic Gods] was slightly more intimate than in the modern age.

During those times, he was still a [Heretic God] wandering freely upon the earth.

His entire body clad in armor, wielding a lance, riding the white divine horse. Sometimes he would appear on the ground as an inhuman white knight, while other times he would roam the skies in the form of lightning.

Anyone with the slightest intelligence would identify him as a war god from that majestic appearance and cower in reverence.

When descending before humans, he appropriately announced his name as the "Lancea God." The only reason why he visited the island of Britain then, was simply on a whim. Because he heard from his old friend in this place that there was a [Heretic God] like him. Because he recalled old ties, he paid a visit without deliberate intent.

"A while ago, I met a rather interesting member of [Steel]."

The old friend smiled as she chatted.

"[Steel]... This Knight's kin?"

"Yes. The great hero, born to exterminate the god-slaying Devil Kings. Quite a few Devil Kings have surfaced in recent times, and that man descends to bring salvation to the world as it approaches end times--"

"Oh? Hence the warrior who manifests at the end of eras."

"Not too long ago, he most splendidly slaughtered the god-slayer rampaging on this island."

It was several decades ago when she was reported to have wandered to this land (later known as Wales).

Thereafter, she was feared as the [Heretic God] who disseminated the blessing of life and the peril of death. She seemed to be known as the "White Goddess" Gwenhwyfar.

"Then his name is?"

"No idea. I already asked, but he remained silent."

"Hmm, he does not want to reveal his name either eh?"

"Seems like it. The people of this land started worshiping him as the island's guardian god, calling him the hero 'Artos.'"

The man known as the "Lancea God." The woman known as the "White Goddess." That was how the bold and ferocious tribes worshiped them.

However, excessively unruly tribes inevitably fell into decline.

Without exception, these peoples lost their country and even their basic traits. Their blood and culture assimilated by other nations, sooner or later, they all lost their defining identities of old.

When cultures change, so do myths.

Sometimes these changes were so drastic that even the names of gods were altered completely.

"Goddess who is this Knight's ancient companion. In that case, this Knight will soon obtain a new name. Hohoho, to encounter such hardship, it seems like the war-torn world is not as pleasant as expected."

"You sound like you are enjoying it."

Hearing the laughter leaking out from the helmet, the ancient mother earth goddess smiled quietly.

A few decades after that, she would forsake immortality for the Holy Grail's creation, and be reborn as the hero's maidservant. A death prior to receiving a new name. Consequently, in accordance with the White Goddess' alias of Gwenhwyfar, the reborn being called herself Guinevere...

"Hmm. After all, this Knight simply journeys along a directionless path. One shall visit the great hero as a way to pass time. Can you inform this Knight of the location?"

Thanking her for the answer, he bid his old friend goodbye and departed.

Riding the divine steed to gallop across the sky, he sped off to the legendary hero's location.

The place where the Devil King exterminating hero slept was located on the peak of a towering mountain.

The knight had always been the rider of the sky-faring divine horse. Allowing his partner to fly like lightning, he easily reached the mountaintop.

Along the way, he spotted the figures of humans striving to climb the mountain.

A group of Britons who also aimed for the peak. But unlike him, they were desperately risking their lives. For the sake of offering prayers of reverence to the hero "Artos" believed to be there.

An iron sword was embedded on the top of the peak.

A sturdy sword. The double-edged blade was extremely long, broad, and heavy in structure.

But compared to its shape, the sword's most outstanding feature was the brilliance radiating from the blade. Emitting from the sturdy sword was a platinum-colored brightness as if coming from a star.

"How truly beautiful..."

A divine sword indeed. A sacred sword indeed. He exclaimed in admiration.

Whether in beauty or power, there was probably no existing sword that could rival it.

The knight was also a sword that had been born like a white meteor, a dragon-slaying and snake-slaughtering sword god. A single glimpse was sufficient for him to know how astounding the platinum divine sword was.

"Pardon this intrusion. This Knight humbly visits this place, seeking the war god who exterminates Devil Kings. One humbly apologizes for the rudeness of disrupting your slumber. Nevertheless, this Knight wishes to converse with the peerless hero and become friends. Pray manifest your divine self."

The platinum divine blade was not only a weapon but the god's avatar.

The Devil King-exterminating warrior was resting in the form of a sword, probably preparing for the next battle. The instincts of a fellow member of [Steel] explained.

In order to induce an awakening, he slowly reached his hand towards the divine sword. Immediately, sparks scattered.

"!"

Sparks turned into electrical shock to assault his hand, preventing his rude contact.

"Fufu... Not waking up so easily eh? Looks like you are a rather weary person, a difficult man to get along with."

Conversely, this cold reception only piqued the knight's interest , causing him to smile.

He -- was to be known as the "Lancea God" Lancelot du Lac in his subsequent encounter with the Devil King Exterminator, not far in the future. That was when the new god-slayer had landed on the island of Britain, subjecting it to unbridled tyranny.

In the decades after that, the mother earth goddess and Lancelot assisted the "Devil King Exterminator" as his companions in battle.

The reasons for the mother earth goddess to do so were unclear. It could very well have been romantic love, but Lancelot was not one so tactless as to deliberately confirm such reasons.

As for Lancelot, his reason was simple. Simply for the sake of seeking intense deadly battles.

This way of life fully satisfied his desires. However, to the very end, the "Devil King Exterminator" never revealed his name or origins.

At the time, Lancelot felt that the man was similar to himself, most likely a god who had also lost his name.

Reminiscing old times, Lancelot suddenly had this thought.

--The strongest of [Steel], one whom we called "King of the End. " That man had probably grown weary of battle.

He distanced himself from everything that could draw him onto the battlefield.

Yes, everything.

He was obliged to eliminate the god-slaying humans. Forced by the stars of destiny to engage in battle.

Why? That man always fought with complete indifference. A shadow of gloom clung onto his face like iron rust, gradually turning his handsome features drab and dismal.

And on certain occasions, as he gazed into the eyes of his comrade on the battlefield, the same disquiet and unsettled feeling could be gathered.

Or perhaps, what the man grew sickened of was not only the enemy--

However, Lancelot du Lac was a resolute warrior from ancient beginnings to the modern day. The most primitive [Steel] that only knew to charge straight forward.

All along, he had never worried over things that could no longer be confirmed.

At this time, he simply shook his head silently, and ended the useless trip down memory lane.

Chapter 1 - Smoldering Devil Kings

Part 1

On this particular day, Alexandre Gascoigne had appeared in Taipei.

Taipei — the well-known central city of Taiwan.

He had gone to the Ningxia Road Night Market. A night market filled with merchandise stalls and snack shops. Every night, the market was crowded with locals and tourists who came here for the distinctive roadside snacks.

People could either eat while standing or sit at tables next to the stalls.

However, tonight Alec picked an aged and worn down restaurant instead.

Sitting down at a table outside the shop, he arbitrarily ordered a few dishes. Since this type of night market did not offer much in terms of alcohol, he brought his own canned beer.

Steamed dumplings, boiled dumplings, rice dumplings with meat fillings, spiced sausages, oyster omelettes, etc.

Just as the dishes were placed on the table, the one he waited for arrived.

"...It's been a while, Alec."

"Ah yes. Approximately a year."

The other person greeted using Min Nan[1] dialect, so Alec replied in the same language.

The one who had arrived was a glasses-wearing seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl.

Called Cecilia.

She was wearing a modest sweater over a white shirt with an unassuming skirt. Even though her face was quite cute, it was lacking in glamor.

Alec had become acquainted with her a few years ago when traveling in the far east. In order to return the favor she owed to Alec that time, she became a member of [Royal Arsenal].

"Then show up at St. Ives from time to time... Wait a minute, have you ever been to headquarters? If memory serves me correctly, you haven't."

St. Ives.

Where the organization led by Alec, [Royal Arsenal], had located its headquarters.

Situated in the region of Cornwall on the westernmost tip of England. It was a little seaside town.

"Your memory is correct. I have never met any comrades apart from you."

Cecilia spoke with a monotonous and indifferent tone. She was a girl who seldom showed emotion through her voice or facial expressions.

"Let's leave it at that... That said, lazy as you are, you still accepted this invitation so readily?"

"Because I wanted to see you."

"Stop joking around. It's making the beer taste funny."

"..."

Her joke instantly rejected, Cecilia fell silent.

Even though she was essentially a reticent and expressionless girl, she almost seemed to be showing a bit of resentment.

Nevertheless, Alec paid it no mind, because there were more important matters.

"You were the one who communicated a wish to see the Island-Fishing Needle. That's what you came for, right?"

Despite her young age, Cecilia was an outstanding Daoist priestess.

Daoists. The term used for those who studied ancient Chinese wizardry, Daoist arts, that had been passed down for generations. At the same time, she was well-versed in oriental myths and legends.

"I don't mind either way."

"Or in other words, that is the sole reason."

She was casting that slanted gaze of subtle resentment again. Was there something she wanted to say?

"This is the Needle in question."

Alec did not mind entering the main topic.

He took a rod out from his shirt pocket. It had roughly the same length and girth as a ball point pen, and appeared to be made of beige plastic. This was the divine artifact obtained from Japan, the Heavenly Reverse Halberd.

"By the way, I've mentioned to you before. Myths that probably originated from southern Chinese sea-faring tribes first crossed over to Taiwan, then spread to southeast Asia, followed by Polynesia and Micronesia. In the process they also spread to Japan."

"Yes, I remember."

"In the creation myths of sea-faring tribes, the world began as an ocean. An endless ocean without any land. At that time, the primordial god of creation lowered a fishing line and fished dry land out of the ocean to create islands. That was the birth of land — the story of the country's founding."

Alec casually explained as he brought food to his mouth with chopsticks between gulps of beer.

"From 4000 BCE to 3000 BCE, the people of the sea traveled south on crude boats across the Pacific, migrating to various parts of the world. This resulted in the scattering of East Asian oceanic creation myths. Of course, this includes Japan."

"Izanagi and Izanami's founding of the country."

"Correct. Izanagi and Izanami were on the primordial sea where there was nothing but minuscule floating and suspended debris. Dipping in the Heavenly Reverse Halberd and stirring, dry land was made to appear, creating the islands of Japan. Well, using a needle as a hook, stirring with a rod, it doesn't really look the same on first glance..."

"That doesn't pose a significant problem."

Alec nodded at Cecilia's brief and casual response.

In ancient Japan, the halberd for fishing — there were records of it being a tool for catching fish. All of these little stories were identical in essence.

"This halberd is a divine artifact with the same name. Naturally one would think it is the country founding tool."

"Alec intends to investigate this thing?"

"Yes. I want to find out exactly what powers this artifact holds, and how to use them flexibly."

Cecilia coldly remarked to Alec:

"No way. Born of mortal flesh, there's no way we could do that. Give it up?"

"Not necessarily. Actually I already came up with one or two ideas."

"...Really?"

Cecilia looked impressed. Beneath her glasses, her pupils were wide open.

Alec shrugged at that honest expression of admiration.

"It's nothing mind blowing. Deducing from the myths, this thing should be a divine artifact related to the divine aspects of water or land. In that case, if a similar god is found somewhere, just use this rod and observe what changes may occur, then proceed with verification."

"...In any case, don't do that in this country. Too dangerous."

Alec smiled knowingly at her refusal.

All along, he had no intention of doing something worthless like that.

"If that's the case, only one option remains. Find divine dragon bones that are related to either the earth or the sea, and use them to make contact with this thing. To assist me, first investigate thoroughly all records of mother earth goddesses and snake or dragon deities that have manifested here in the past hundred years ."

"...Dragon bones. There is that option indeed. But Alec, trying to find that kind of thing is even harder than finding gods."

"Hard, but not impossible. It's worth considering."

Listening to his subordinate's opinion, Alec was completely nonchalant.

For the sake of solving all sorts of mysteries, he had stepped foot into many sacred domains. This level of exploration was merely on the level of warm-up exercises.

"Considering the fact that discovering them could mean avoiding meaningless battles, it will be far more efficient than searching for a god. Don't overlook that."

"I didn't. It's just that your ideas are very strange."

Cecilia was expressing simple and easily-read emotions for once . She sighed deeply.

"Alec, you are truly extraordinary. In matters of bringing chaos to the world, no one can surpass you. Compared to the other Campiones, you are definitely ahead."

Casual praise. But abjectly notorious.

"I'm nowhere near as barbaric or reckless as those people. Don't even think of grouping me together with them."

Alec could not help but retort displeased.

A few days passed.

Alec was strolling casually in Los Angeles.

He had been to Taiwan, the Philippines and even the interior of China. In these past days, he had journeyed far and wide across many different countries and regions. In the end, he chose to finish his trip here.

Alec was operating alone. Having given Cecilia new instructions, he sent her off on a separate mission.

He took a taxi cab from the airport to the great city on the American west coast.

Los Angeles. An ethnic melting pot. A major economical and industrial stronghold. The city of evil that was swirling with crime. The capital where depravity and prosperity vied for domination.

Hidden in this "chaotic" city were many whose existences would not be tolerated by common reason.

Wielders of unnatural abilities who obtained magical powers by selling morality and conscience to the devil — sorcerers. Last but not least, there was John Pluto Smith!

Alec did not believe he could avoid dealing with him during this trip to America.

Steeling his determination, Alec took the taxi to Samantha University at Los Feliz. He had been there only once, a few years ago. The internal layout of the university had remained completely unchanged.

Consequently, everything went smoothly for Alec.

Getting off from the taxi, he began making his way without even glancing at the directory. The route had already been memorized.

Arriving at Professor Joe West's research lab in the modern languages department, he knocked. Receiving a reply of "Please enter," he pushed the door open without reservations. Two people were already present.

The elderly African-American with the intellectual appearance and a Caucasian woman with fiery red hair.

The former was naturally Professor West. A world-renowned researcher of fantasy literature and benevolent mage. His power as a fairy doctor was also unmatched in Europe.

As for that woman, she was most likely Annie Charlton.

A student in West's class. The impressive bespectacled beauty who was the same age as Alec. A calm and composed character who took action with great initiative. She also worked as John Pluto Smith's subordinate, apparently performing detective work or the like—

The Professor seemed to be in shock while his student displayed cautious surprise.

Previously, they had already seen the Campione known as the Black Prince.

"I remember today's visitor should have been a Mr. Gascony introduced by Pires-kun. What kind of funny idea is this?"

Professor West scrutinized Alec's face as he spoke.

"Exactly as was said. I am Alex Gascony. A Frenchman heading to Oxford for study, and a student hoping to meet you today. That's the story."

Alec admitted the pretense without reservation. After all, it was likely that the fairy doctor would have seen through a disguise. Hence, he openly showed the face of the Black Prince and made a visit under an awkward alias.

"Hmm. I see."

Using the name of Alexandre Gascoigne to make a visit to a facility related to John Pluto Smith would have been strange behavior that would easily develop into diplomatic problems between Devil Kings.

In order to avoid undue alarm, Alec had chosen to arrive in such a manner—

Presumably having figured out Alec's intentions, the Professor shrugged and sighed slightly.

"I guess I'd better ignore the fact that the name is reminiscent of a certain someone who is cause for concern. No, I think I'd better think more carefully about it!"

"Come on, at a time like this, formality is more important than substance. Hence this is enough."

"Then for what purpose has Mr. Gascony come to this place?"

Annie Charlton interrupted.

She glared very sharply at Alec. If the Professor was met with danger she would immediately step forward to protect him. Such resolve was clearly visible. What an amazing heroic female.

"I don't plan on hanging around for long, so let's cut to the chase. Dragon bones — or using the way they call it in this city, that would be 'Angel's Remains.' Please lend them to me for a brief little while."

"What?"

"What are you intending to do with that sort of thing?"

Alec smiled proudly in response to Annie and the Professor's surprise.

"For experiment and verification."

"Are you planning to bring turmoil to the world again?"

"So, what are you going to do? Even though I intend to perform an act of charity by removing a seed of disaster from the world, people who don't mind their business would probably disagree. Whether what I described is an act of good or evil, there is no way for you to ascertain."

Alec seemed to be deliberately evading Annie's question.

"Anyway, I need dragon bones for this reason. Professor, I received news that you obtained dragon bones from Sichuan province in China roughly ten years ago. If you'll lend them out generously, I won't have to waste any unnecessary effort. I hope you will consider it."

Unnecessary effort. Namely, theft.

Whenever there was something he wished to obtain, no matter what kind of wealth, authority, or magic the owner possessed, he would never shy away from the act of theft. Being concerned with society's notions of morals or common sense was completely not his style.

"You are a terrible man! Despite your usual serious demeanor and behavior, once you get into action, you reveal that horrible troublemaking nature of yours!"

West shook his head with great annoyance.

"Very well, As you wish. I will provide you with the 'Remains' I possess."

"Joe! You cannot decide so rashly!"

In response to Annie Charlton's warning, Joe West answered with deep consideration.

"Asherah has perished, and the [King of Flies] is disbanded. Los Angeles is currently celebrating long awaited peace that had not appeared for years. It's time to put aside the conflict between Pluto and the Black Prince. Besides, Annie, I don't believe he is the kind of Devil King who would easily resort to theft and take what he wants without warning."

In a duel between two Devil Kings, the outcome was completely uncertain. This was not a matter of who was stronger.

Because a Campione's talent lay precisely in seeking victory no matter the odds, achieving success through apparently foolish but bold action.

However, the matter of winning or losing was not only limited to 'theft.'

Joe West was correct. This was Black Prince Alec's personal victory.

He was the Devil King of divine speed and the labyrinth. The one who vanquished innumerable foes using suspicious authorities. Furthermore, he was skilled in magic and strategy. This sort of disposition made him the most powerful eccentric thief in history.

Finally with great reluctance, Annie nodded in agreement to her teacher's words.

Part 2

On a table in the research lab was a shallow dish.

In it sat a milky-white little stone.

"Reportedly, when a [Heretic God] manifesting on earth loses their material body, in extremely rare instances, a portion of their remains survive as flesh and bone. Chinese Daoists call them ' Dragon's Bones' while North American magi call them 'Angel's Remains.' Isn't that right?"

"Ah yes. But of course, flesh and bone that is completely different from any other creature on earth."

As Alec muttered while examining the stone, the Professor replied.

"When deities pass on, their bodies either turn into sand and collapse or change into stone and shatter. On those occasions, if a part maintains its form by chance, then it becomes worshiped as a sacred relic, to be used as a massive power source for magi. Well, it is an exceptionally rare thing to find."

The Professor looked down at the stone in the shallow dish.

"This was the object found by chance from a place in China where the creation goddess Nüwa[2] had descended."

"Nüwa. Also a mother earth goddess possessing a 'snake' divinity."

Alec took out the Heavenly Reverse Halberd from his pocket, and brought it close to the milky-white stone.

The Halberd proceeded to lengthen. From the length of a ballpoint pen it became almost a meter long. The change rendered Professor West and Annie speechless.

"As expected, it reacted to the mother earth goddess' remains..."

Alec knew from his decade long experience in adventuring.

The "remains" of deities carried divine properties far surpassing divine beasts in level. They could very well provide the same effect as contact with a god—

Alec smiled at the smooth progress of his plan.

So, how should he use this Halberd? Let's try stabbing the tip into the floor and see... It went through. It almost felt like sticking a rod into mud.

The Heavenly Reverse Halberd's tip was embedded into the ceramic tiled floor.

"Before the founding of the country, amorphous land was floating and suspended like globules of fat. Izanagi and Izanami were tasked with 'maintaining and stabilizing this floating country ,' and were bestowed the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. The two gods stood atop the Floating Bridge of Heaven, inserting this Halberd into the sea, and started to stir..."

Alec recalled the passage in Japanese mythology.

He attempted to stir the tiled floor using the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. Amazing. The ceramic tiles gradually lost hardness and cohesion. In the beginning, it felt like mixing concrete, but gradually the sense of resistance disappeared, like ice-cream melting.

"...Melted? Did it lose its form?"

"Using the Japanese way of description, it should be called the ' Leech Child'[3] state."

The Professor and Alec, as well as Annie who had remained silent all this time, were all focusing their gaze on this phenomenon.

Mere dozens of seconds ago, the ceramic tiles were still a part of the floor.

But now they had become a flowing liquid with a color that was hard to describe. On first glance it appeared transparent and colorless, but continued scrutiny found it to be pure white, then glittering with light. Flashing all sorts of colored light, it kept changing colors like a kaleidoscope.

Within it, all the colors of the human world could be found. Colorlessness carrying infinite color.

"...Gascony. Or rather, Alexandre Gascoigne. What is the 'Leech Child'?"

Annie suddenly questioned, but not in a student's manner.

Or more accurately, it was like the royal tone of one king questioning another as equals.

"That was the deformed child who was the firstborn of Japan's creator gods Izanagi and Izanami. His body was said to be amorphous and lacking in bones. Soon after his birth, he was washed into the ocean and buried in darkness..."

As Alec explained, he suddenly had an idea.

He reversed the clockwise motion he was using to stir the Heavenly Reverse Halberd, and tried going counterclockwise instead. After stirring for a while, the sense of resistance gradually increased.

The feeling of stirring water soon became that of stirring ice-cream.

Then it became like stirring concrete, and finally, completely solid.

...The ceramic tiles on the floor were restored. Well, except there was a spiral pattern in the center of the tiles, so it was not exactly back to its original appearance.

"The 'island-fishing' and 'country-founding' myths passed down in East Asia and the South Seas.[4] Could this Halberd be that divine artifact reappeared...? The key to forming land and even giving birth to the Leech Child..."

Alec's mind was a turbulent sea of recalled facts and imaginings .

The strongest [Steel]. The king who manifests at the end of eras. Past incidents in Japan. The Heavenly Reverse Halberd's requisite powers. Also, Avalon and Guinevere...

"Come to think of it, now should be a perfect opportunity to cut those cursed ties with that woman..."

Alec used the magic of [Dismissal] to dispel the Heavenly Reverse Halberd.

This allowed it to be retrieved when necessary by the magic of [Summoning]. European knights used this magic whenever they needed to carry their swords and lances with them. Alec proceeded to turn to the owner of the lab.

"My apologies for taking up your time. My matter has finished so let me take my leave."

"For us, that is the greatest favor you could do."

Towards Alec's statement, Annie responded with a displeased expression:

"Then leave, before you bring disaster to our city. Alexandre Gascoigne, I sincerely hope you never step foot in California ever again!"

Leaving the research lab, Alec turned himself into lightning and headed towards the sea.

In order to test the functions of the Heavenly Reverse Halberd again.

Satisfied with the results, he decided to spend the night in Los Angeles.

It was a room facing the Pacific Ocean, in a high class hotel. Having arranged room service and finished his meal, his bed was already prepared.

However, Alec was sitting on a chair by the window, deep in thought.

Traveling to the west coast of North America all the way from East Asia, he was both exhausted and jetlagged. Be that as it may, there was still a mountain of matters to consider.

Alec had cast "barrier" magic in the room beforehand.

Simple magic for warning about the approach of danger. Nevertheless, it was more than sufficient for the Campione of divine speed. Whether fleeing, fighting, or confusing the enemy, the choice was up to him. As a result, Alec simply spoke indifferently when the magic alarm sounded.

"If you want to visit at night, shouldn't you call first?"

"This level of rudeness is completely acceptable for a gentleman's room that was booked under a fake name. Avoiding unnecessary toil is my style."

What kind of mystic technique or method had been used?

What should have been a locked window was now flung open, causing the curtains to flutter in the wind.

Casually stepping in from outside the window was a black-masked eccentric. Furthermore, this room was on the tenth floor of a high-rise hotel.

The mask's visor had a design reminiscent of insectoid eyes.

Under the cape which resembled a demonic bird's wings, an eccentric person was dressed in an opera-style high class outfit.

"Gascoigne. You and I had agreed to a non-aggression pact. Does your current visit not violate those terms?"

John Pluto Smith. The dark Devil King who lorded over Los Angeles had appeared.

"I'm not visiting as Alexandre Gascoigne... I have already communicated this fact to your subordinates."

"From the abysmal attitude you showed to my friends at the lab , this statement of yours is as good as junk."

Smith shrugged his black-caped shoulders. It was an exaggerated motion that one would find in a theatre performance.

The ordinary hotel room had essentially been turned into a theatrical stage.

"In the coastal waters of Los Angeles... In the Channel Islands' vicinity, an island not recorded in maps had suddenly appeared. This strange phenomenon happened around 1500 hours today."

"Oh?"

"Furthermore, at around 1700 hours, this island suddenly vanished again."

"Really?"

"It was reported to me by a benevolent mage who sensed massive magical power and deliberately went to investigate. By the way, Gascoigne, you seem to be personally carrying a divine artifact?"

"Purely coincidence. So what?"

Alec replied nonchalantly.

"With regard to this matter, it's in your best interests not to get in my way."

"That really sounds oh so attractive... What are you planning, Gascoigne?"

The mask's visor glared at Alec's handsome face.

"It is true that your grand imagination and initiative are your strong points. However, if memory serves me, you have never applied those strengths towards anything apart from personal hobbies. Even one such as I, believes that you need to be treated with caution."

"Stop talking nonsense. I am neither as self-centered nor as destructive as people say I am."

"That I can agree. However, compared to common morality, you place greater importance on your personal aesthetic ideals. Furthermore, your reckless, inconsiderate, and troublemaking personality is exactly as rumored. Hence I believe public opinion cannot be dismissed."

"...Eh."

"Consequently, trusting you unconditionally would be equivalent to a dangerous gamble."

Alec smacked his lips, declining to retort.

This melodramatic cosplay maniac was different from China's freakishly strong girl or Italy's idiot. If one were to offer negotiations, this man could at least be counted on to respond rationally. The agenda must be pushed.

"How about eliminating the leader of the Divine Ancestors? A plan to root out and cleanse the seeds of trouble. This should have personal relevance to you."

"Divine Ancestor. A term last heard many months ago."

"Entrenched in North America, sorcerers have been classified into various factions. One of them is composed of witches who worshiped as queens the European Divine Ancestors of old. That group of witches crossed over from Europe to the American continent during pioneering days, and wreaked much havoc."

Alec brought up the dark side of history known only to magi.

Of course, Smith was well aware of it. After all, the [King of Flies] he had spent the last few years fighting was a faction of sorcerers related to witch lineages.

Finally, the black-masked king nodded and went "True."

"These witches' secretive activities and troublemaking preparations, caused the Protestant clergy to enter a pathological fervor on witch hunts. This resulted in the torture of many innocent women. A most tragic event."

"...So, Gascoigne."

The mask's visor pointed straight at Alec as Smith began to speak.

"In other words, is this what you are proposing? The Divine Ancestors, who still hold great influence over sorcerers — in order to deal them a devastating blow, I should turn a blind eye to your secretive dealings."

"Ah yes. You don't want to fight a second Asherah, right?"

"Hmm."

Smith paused silently for a brief moment, then began to mutter slowly.

"True, this is mutually beneficial. However."

"What is it? Do you need evidence that I am speaking the truth? "

"Demanding that from a man like you would be useless. Only because your wit and imagination are indeed exemplary. However , when unexpected incidents flare up, it is also true that you abandon those qualities without hesitation."

"That's not abandoning. It's just ad-libbing in response to changing situations!"

Alec could not help but make a violent outburst at the accusation.

"Our opponents have always been gods and our peers, the Campiones. Precisely because common sense and logic are never applicable to these opponents, reacting flexibly is only natural."

"Well. I can't disagree with that... But for you, being flexible can result in the original plan going completely awry. Probably that time when the fake Grail had appeared, you began taking reckless action on your own, and ignored your negotiations with that Princess."

Princess.

Naturally, Smith was referring to the former spokesperson of England's Witenagemot, daughter of Duke Gododdin, Alice Louise of Navarre.

Alec could not believe that that woman had disclosed their secret agreement so easily...!

Alec was secretly incensed by Smith's sarcastic tone. However.

"Having said that, I am also well aware that Alexandre Gascoigne's plans do succeed on occasion, numerous times... Very well, I shall turn a blind eye to your rudeness this time."

"Really. Then I apologize."

Alec calmed down from Smith's words. Even though he was nowhere near as melodramatic as that masked eccentric, the Black Prince was also a rather vain Campione.

Having ended the conversation, John Pluto Smith bowed elegantly and left through the window.

Exactly how a famous actor would exit the stage after the curtain call.

In less than twenty seconds, Alec took a brief glance out of the window, but there were no signs of the black-caped black-masked hero. He had vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Still a man who comes and goes so mysteriously."

After grumbling to himself, Alec took out his cellphone.

He made an international call to his trusted subordinate in England, Sir Iceman.

Alec succinctly summed up for the legendary knight the "plan" he had crystallized over the past few hours. For the organization leader to be abroad for extended periods of time, strategizing and taking action personally, Sir Iceman could only lament against the reckless plan.

'...Also, protests against your activities have been received from those working under Japan's Campione. They demand us to disclose the whereabouts of Alexandre Gascoigne which we don't even know. We managed to contain the situation for now.'

"Ignore them. I will handle it directly later."

To be on the safe side, Alec quickly added:

"Just handle things at headquarters as usual. If Kusanagi Godou intrudes in a rage, retreat immediately. There is no need to directly confront disasters such as god-slayers. As much as possible, just let him waste his energy."

'As you wish. With the leader absent, that's the best we could do anyway.'

Alec retorted coldly in reply to Iceman's sarcasm.

"Don't say it like that. In order to permanently sever this ill fate with Guinevere, taking back what is owed is only right. It would be stupid to waste an opportunity to lay a trap for that woman. So let me act as I wish for a while."

This was late at night on Thursday in Los Angeles.

At the same time, it was early Friday evening in Japan due to the time difference. Furthermore, the Campione who lived in the east had already begun his move.

Part 3

One week had gone by since Athena had passed away in Japan.

During this time, the world's busiest Devil King was Alexandre Gascoigne. On the other hand, Japan's Kusanagi Godou carried on with his ordinary life.

No matter what, he was still a student. Going to school was his duty.

However, that did not mean he was leading a peaceful life. In fact, it could very well be described as the opposite.

The upcoming Saturday and Sunday were part of a long weekend along with Monday. During this time, Godou had been making preparations with great determination. The entire detailed story follows.

It was the following night after Godou had fought Lancelot and seen Athena off as she passed away.

Godou was greatly surprised to read the arrived letter.

'Seeing as this object piques this humble servant's interest, one shall retain custody for now. By this simple expression of borrowing intent, your consent would be most desirable. The object in question shall be returned after thorough experimentation . Should the object in question be deemed to require our protection , the experiment could possibly be extended, one humbly prays for your understanding — Alexandre Gascoigne.'

This letter had been delivered to the History Compilation Committee.

Signed Alexandre Gascoigne, the Campione who had taken the Heavenly Reverse Halberd by force. Godou recalled that the guy was nicknamed something like Black Prince Alec.

"...In other words, he's saying 'I borrowed it because it interested me, so don't be offended if I happen to decide not to return it.' What the heck, this guy!"

Godou objected as he finished the letter.

It had reportedly been sent via magic to the Sayanomiya residence at Sanbanchou in Tokyo's Chiyoda ward.

After returning from Kisarazu, he did not head home immediately but visited the Sayanomiya residence to examine Alec's letter and discuss their next move.

"So this is Black Prince Alec's infamous 'borrowing note'? This is my first time seeing one."

The one grumbling was the next Sayanomiya family head, Sayanomiya Kaoru.

Occupying the drawing room in the house were the three: the cross-dressing beauty, Godou and Erica.

A three-person emergency meeting. Ena had been forcibly hospitalized for overuse of divine possession. Yuri and Liliana were still at the hospital undergoing examinations for sequelae from the petrification. Amakasu had also gone out to oversee the handling of the aftermath.

"That guy has apparently done this kind of stuff many times, right?"

"Yes, that person has plundered sacred treasures and divine artifacts collected by various European magic associations. His explanation is always 'Now this is interesting, let me check it out.'"

Erica shrugged as she answered Godou's question.

"He prefers dramatically penetrating heavy security to steal after a prior declaration of intent. Unless there was no opportunity to put on a good show, then he simply leaves a borrowing note and takes by force. Also, items of particular significance are never returned but kept and displayed at his association [Royal Arsenal]. "

"It's said he boasts of imitating the style of traditional British imperialism."

England's pride, the British Museum.

Within it was displayed a multitude of artifacts plundered from various places around the world, a rather well-known fact...

So that Campione was deliberately imitating it. Godou was reminded of the description "the eccentric man with dismal character" that he had heard before.

"The English Campione, no mistake about it, right?"

"Yes. It is often rumored that amongst the seven Devil Kings, his interests were slightly different from the others."

Kaoru answered as she gave Erica a glance.

"Regarding this matter, shouldn't Erica-san be particularly informed?"

"That's right. We European magi have been greatly troubled ever since that particular person became a Campione twelve years ago."

Erica began to lead the conversation.

"Marquis Voban, Her Eminence Luo Hao, Sir Salvatore, John Pluto Smith-sama, and Kusanagi Godou. These five are all ' warriors.' They only shine with true radiance and feel satisfaction during battle. But limited to gods or other Campiones as opponents, of course."

"...Can you stop grouping me with those people so easily?"

Even though Godou complained about the inappropriate example, Erica continued unfazed.

"Since the Black Prince is a Campione after all, I believe he has to be a 'warrior.' But from the way he acts, he is also an 'explorer' and an 'adventurer' at the same time."

"Explorer and adventurer...?"

Godou began to ponder the unexpected description.

"So you mean that guy not only lives to fight, but also seeks meaning in life by challenging mysteries and dangerous things?"

"An apt description. Indeed it is so. Thus resulting in this note we were talking about."

"It's not that different from that idiot Doni who keeps saying ' have a little duel with me, please'..."

Godou continued to grumble as he looked at the note Erica was referring to.

"However, why did he steal the Heavenly Reverse Halberd? Could he intend to give it to Guinevere's gang?"

"I consider that extremely unlikely. The Black Prince has been enemies with Guinevere for many years."

"If that's the case, then let's just put aside for now the issue of that Gascoigne guy."

Hearing Erica's answer, Godou remarked.

"If the Heavenly Reverse Halberd is in his hands, Guinevere and her group's attentions should be focusing on him, right? Then during this time we can prepare for other things."

"Other things?"

"Yes. To prepare for the battle against that guy — Lancelot."

Godou asserted in response to Kaoru's question.

Hearing the war god's name, both the cross-dressing beauty and Erica nodded.

"Even though it is baseless intuition... I believe that guy will come to Japan again for a fight. I want to be ready when the time comes."

Lancelot du Lac who had killed Athena.

Without even thinking, Godou had declared he will fight that god again. Furthermore, his heart believed that day would not be far away.

Or perhaps, it was a god-slayer's instincts that made the prediction.

In that case, forging the [Sword] in preparation for Lancelot's duel was imperative.

The following day was Monday.

Yuri and Liliana missed class because their checkup at the hospital had been extended.

Then came Tuesday. Assured that they were fine, the two had returned to school.

On this day, Godou and the rest were having lunch in the courtyard.

Even though they had been meeting for lunch on the roof all along, it was now the middle of November.

The blowing wind had become rather chilly so they changed their lunch location to the courtyard. Since the surroundings were enclosed by the buildings' walls, it was quite warm as long as there was direct sunlight.

Having sat down for lunch, Godou received the report of "Black Prince Alec, whereabouts unknown."

"Godou, you asked me to express your displeasure concerning this incident, right?"

"Ah yes."

"Hence, [Royal Arsenal] had been contacted. As their second-in-command, Sir Iceman acknowledged the Black Prince's appearance in Japan which occurred two days ago."

Erica reported with a glum expression.

"They expressed ignorance as to the Black Prince's current whereabouts."

"Normally, when an organization's leader is absent, shouldn't they know exactly where he is instead?"

Godou exclaimed in surprise.

Where did Black Prince Alec disappear to after stealing the Heavenly Reverse Halberd from Amakasu? The History Compilation Committee's special agents also seemed unable to find out. What a mystery.

"In actual fact, Sir Iceman happens to be acquainted with my Esteemed Uncle since childhood. Here are his exact words."

A legendary knight on the same level as Erica's uncle, Paolo Blandelli.

'My utmost apologies. Alexandre Gascoigne has completely ignored our efforts to contact him for the past few days, and his status is currently unknown. It is most regrettable, but it happens quite often unfortunately.'

'In that case, the only option is to wait for him to contact us. Our chief's location, what he's doing, facing what kind of danger... We usually find out only after the fact. And this time, even Japan's Campione has expressed his displeasure. Really, my stomach pains are going to kill me...'

Those were the words of the man known as Sir Iceman.

Listening to the voice through the phone, Erica could not discern any intent to conceal the truth. Rather, it felt like she was catching a glimpse of a loyal vassal's troubles over an excessively unruly master.

"I too, have heard stories of Prince Alec's excessive preference for acting alone, often leaving his subordinates behind. In that case , it could very well be the truth."

Liliana spoke as she opened the lunch basket.

"Of course, the possibility that he is deliberately hiding the truth remains. But still, their explanation is quite plausible."

Liliana glanced at Godou as she handed the hamburger over to him.

Held between two pieces of bread was a beef patty, tomatoes, lettuce, bacon, avocado, and cheese, secured with a plastic toothpick.

Other than that, she had also prepared pickles, onion rings and more.

Despite the sumptuous menu, rather than eating, Godou was more concerned about the knight's attitude.

"What's with that strange look?"

"Ah, no. I was just thinking whether all the various Campiones were natural troublemakers without exception."

"It really is true. They are a group to whom common sense cannot be applied."

Why was even Yuri gazing at Godou as she spoke?

Recently, it felt like the girls around him were increasing the frequency of such biting commentary... It always gave Godou an uneasy feeling.

"Anyway, it's unclear where in the world Black Prince Alec is currently located. That person has the ability to fly around like lightning. Even if he had been traveling from the Arctic to Antarctica these few days, it would come as no surprise."

In a rare moment, Erica declared defeat as she gracefully received and sipped the tea handed to her by Yuri.

"A genius who can move and act instantaneously in a composed manner. Acting as if the surrounding people would just get up and follow him. Had he been the boss of Amadeus Mozart, he would have made a really good role model."

"Let's just put that guy's issues aside for now. No matter what, handling the problem of Lancelot would be the most practical course of action."

"Heretic Lancelot is a very difficult to understand divinity."

Liliana said to Godou as he pondered.

"He only acts as a guardian for an extremely rare number of top witches, protecting them secretly. Neither Erica nor I know what his prototype is."

"I have something to say to Godou regarding this."

Erica interrupted.

"If you want to find out the secrets of witches, just go ahead and ask a witch. Since this is a secret not even Liliana knows, the candidates for counsel are obviously limited, right? Hence, I've already attempted to contact that person, and received a response of 'I can offer assistance on a personal level.'"

"That person?"

"Yes. The highborn one in London."

Godou nodded. After the battle with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, he had heard about her origins. Amongst those he was acquainted with, the only witches surpassing Liliana were Lucretia Zola and that person.

"That person also said, 'if you want to approach the mystery of Heretic Lancelot, bring the miko over.'"

Hearing Erica passing along the message, Godou looked to the Yamato Nadeshiko sitting on his left.

Miko. Of course it meant Mariya Yuri. Godou immediately spoke:

"May I trouble you, Mariya?"

"Y-Yes. Of course you may!"

Yuri nodded and blushed for some reason.

"As long as Godou-san wishes... No matter where, I will always accompany you..."

"That'd be a great help. Thank you very much."

"Even though it bears no mentioning, I will come as well. To take on the role of contacting that person, the prime candidate is obviously your knight, Erica Blandelli."

"Of course. Things would be difficult without you there."

Godou instantly agreed to Erica's interruption. The thought of the blonde red maiden not accompanying him never crossed his mind.

"Liliana, can I leave travel preparations in your hands?"

"You, Erica and Mariya Yuri. That is three in number, right? ... Umm, can you tell me if you will be needing one more person...?"

The one who called herself Grand Chamberlain, Liliana, answered rather awkwardly.

"Isn't that a strange thing to ask?"

"Y-Yes. Well then, it is decided."

After hearing Godou's deliberately ambiguous response, Liliana immediately brightened up in mood.

Travel preparations would be made for four people. Next they only had to wait for the day of departure — Just as Godou nodded to himself...

"But Godou-san, are you planning to go this weekend?"

"Ah yes, that's the plan."

"You already spent last weekend away from home. Will everyone in the Kusanagi household allow this?"

Only when prompted by Yuri's worried reminder did Godou finally realize.

Last week he had spent two consecutive nights away from home on Friday and Saturday due to the battles with Athena and Lancelot. If he set off after school this Friday, it would be having excursions two weeks in a row.

Any normal high school student's family would never allow such a thing.

In this regard, the Mariya family which supported their daughter's responsibilities as a Hime-Miko, as well as the Blandelli and Kranjcar families which do not have guardians in the first place, were quite atypical. However.

"I don't know if I should feel lucky or not, but the guardians in my family are quite unusual so there shouldn't be a problem."

As he imagined the responses of the Kusanagi household, Godou explained without a worry.

If his mother Kusanagi Mayo was being asked for permission to go on a trip:

'Oh? Don't bother bringing back souvenirs. I'm not interested in food I don't like. If you insist on a gift no matter what, I'll only accept alcohol.'

Something like that. She would answer without even caring to ask where the destination was.

If his grandfather Kusanagi Ichirou was being asked for permission to go on a trip, he would probably smile suddenly and gaze at Godou like some sort of accomplice.

My legal guardians are truly extraordinary. Godou marveled in surprise as he imagined.

"However, would your little sister Shizuka not say anything? Actually yesterday, during the tea ceremony club's activities, she was very angry because Godou-san spent the night outside without even telling her where you went."

"...Eh? Her, something like that happened?"

Little sister Kusanagi Shizuka. Godou was greatly surprised to hear the unexpected name.

Now that he thought about it, she did complain to him when he returned from Kisarazu.

"Right. She's the one person who belongs in the normal category ."

Godou muttered as he hugged his shoulders.

Well, she was also the little sister who had shown remarkable potential during the Kusanagi clan's new year celebration by nonchalantly opening a bottle of whisky.

"Man, I'd better find a suitable excuse, or else..."

He could not let his family worry. Godou grumbled as he thought to himself.

"So, would you like me to intercede with Shizuka on your behalf?"

"Mariya?"

"Yes. I shall tell her that a matter urgently requires Godou-san's assistance, and that you need to go somewhere a little far."

Yuri suggested with a calm smile.

That's right. Under the pretext of helping friends, perhaps Shizuka could empathize. Because the younger sister had such a competitive spirit, she loved making fusses over nothing.

"That could work. Thanks a lot, Mari—"

"I don't want to rain on your parade, but I would suggest otherwise. If you seriously go that route, it will only pour oil over the fire."

"It is as Erica says. Please do not make unnecessary provocations towards an injured beast."

Erica and Liliana both voiced their objections to Yuri's proposal.

"Actually, I think if this reason was used, my little sister wouldn't object."

"Yes. Little sister Shizuka is a person with a gentle heart..."

Godou and Yuri were mystified.

"Gentleness is irrelevant here."

"The problem here lies in using Yuri to bail you out. Naturally, using either Liliana or my name won't work either. You're going to have to find a more effective excuse, Godou... Well, if worse comes to worst, you can simply leave without saying a word, thereby preventing any resistance in particular."

The genius negotiator, the [Diavolo Rosso], shrugged.

No matter what, ignoring the little sister too much was a bad idea. What should Godou do?

Wednesday arrived the following day, but Godou had yet to come up with an explanation for his sister.

Godou went to visit Seishuuin Ena.

Having fought desperately on her own in the battles a few days ago, Ena was about to return to her ancestral home at Chichibu for recuperation. Godou had heard that her body had accumulated an extraordinary amount of fatigue and injury due to overusing divine possession.

"Yes, even though it's true my body continues to feel quite heavy, it's still barely okay, and I'm fine with going along with Your Majesty. But I can't believe everyone wants to lock up poor Ena in the old home!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword voiced her displeasure to the visitor Godou.

She was on a hospital bed.

"Seishuuin, you worked very hard already and should rest properly now. Erica has returned so you don't have to worry about me."

"That may be true, but Ena still wants to stay with Your Majesty ."

In a rare moment, Ena was acting cute like a spoiled child as she pleaded with Godou.

Maybe she was feeling lonely and worried due to her weakened body? Godou placed his hand on Ena's shoulder and persuaded her gently.

"If you force yourself too much and wreck your health, I will be very troubled. I want to be together with a lively and healthy Seishuuin. So please, get some rest obediently during this time."

"Mmm, come on... I can't believe you'd say it like that, Your Majesty is so sly."

Faced with Godou's sincere request, Ena pouted as she nodded.

"No matter how reluctant I am, this is the request of my husband after all. Ena will rest properly."

"I-I see. I'm sorry it has to be like this."

Even though Godou grew frantic at being called her husband, he smiled with reassurance.

"However, if there is a next time... Ena needs a kiss, oh? Otherwise, Ena will not listen to Your Majesty's orders ever again."

Shyly throwing a little tantrum, Ena was irresistibly cute. Nevertheless, that was a truly problematic demand.

Panicking as he tried to come up with an answer to muddle through ambiguously, Godou was instantly trapped by Ena.

"Because this is a promise. Keep your word properly!"

Despite the unexpected development, Godou managed to convince Ena to recuperate obediently without issue.

The remaining problem was Shizuka. He was in big trouble this time. Would he need to resort to departing unannounced? Godou continued to contemplate the troublesome issue.

Part 4

Thursday arrived at last, the day prior to departure.

Walking home from school, Godou had almost resigned himself to leave without telling Shizuka, but an encounter with the childhood friend changed the situation.

"Hey Godou, you came at the right time."

Walking along the shopping street in Nezu Sanchoume, he was stopped by his twin-tailed childhood friend with the forceful personality, Tokunaga Asuka.

She must have just returned from school as well, since she was still in Tokyo Metropolitan High's uniform.

"Early next month is Shizuka-chan's birthday, right? Have you prepared a gift?"

"...Now that you brought it up, yeah you're right."

Asuka instantly frowned at his answer.

"Look at you. You must have forgotten completely. Unbelievable! So of course, you still haven't gotten a gift, right?"

"Uh yeah, nothing at all."

"Oh come on! If you take such sloppy care of girls, even if it's Shizuka-chan, she will be angry for sure. You're a really useless older brother!"

As always, Asuka was scolding mercilessly.

"Taking care and whatnot... She's family, my sister, right? I shouldn't need to take great pains, right?"

"It's how you should act as a man."

Really? Godou began to ponder Asuka's words with a "Hmm."

"Well, fine. How about going shopping for a gift with me this weekend? Which day would be better for you, Saturday or Sunday ? But I'll need to work on Saturday, so only the morning is free."

Making plans on her own before Godou could respond, Asuka proposed with great ferocity.

"Sorry, I've already got plans this weekend. Neither Saturday nor Sunday works."

Godou refused.

Since he had long distance travel plans, there was no time to spare for Asuka.

"Shopping only takes an hour or two, right? You can't even spare a little time like that?"

"I need to make a brief trip abroad... And all sorts of troubles will be coming up later. I feel like it'd be a disaster if I can't handle that guy properly, so I have no choice but to go."

Unable to give out any details, Godou could only word things ambiguously.

Will she accept this explanation? Just as Godou worried over what he should add to the explanation, Asuka sighed deeply with a great "hah~"

"Oh fine. Then let's go shopping the following week. That's not a problem, right?"

"Right. Nothing's planned. But I can't guarantee emergencies won't come up."

"Worry about it when the time comes. We'll just adapt flexibly as things change. Then let's decide the details next week."

Godou was amazed at the childhood friend's response. He could not believe she did not raise a fuss over his explanation.

Asuka was someone whose scoldings had always been as common as greetings to him. She proceeded to remark knowingly:

"Since you described it that way, you must be going on a trip for the sake of friends, right? All things considered, you were a guy who went all the way to Kanazawa to help out a friend in need back when you were only in sixth grade."

"Ah yeah. Now that you brought it up, something like that did happen."

It was a nostalgic memory he had almost forgotten.

At the time, a friend of Godou and Asuka's had run into trouble after transferring to Kanazawa (the one in Ishikawa prefecture, naturally)... And Godou departed after leaving a voice message of "Just gonna have a look."

Godou had originally planned to go alone, but Asuka went along because she was worried.

The Tokunaga family went into an uproar, believing "Could they have eloped!?" As a side note, the Kusanagi family seemed to have reacted with "Nothing special really" in complete nonchalance.

"Those fleeting footsteps of yours really scared me. And I was completely awed by your savings which did not match your identity as an elementary schooler. By the way, I've heard about your victories in the strange contests held during the Kusanagi clan's New Year gatherings, who knew you could gamble and win money from that..."

"......"

It was true indeed. The entire travel expenses of the two elementary schoolers were borne by Godou alone.

Asuka had not brought enough money but Godou turned out to be rather well off.

Every New Year's, the entire Kusanagi clan gathered for a banquet followed by a mix of oriental and occidental games including Hanafuda, cee-lo, backgammon, poker, mahjong. Children were supposed to be forbidden from participating, but somehow Godou was able to slip past that restriction at the age of six.

In the beginning, he participated mostly for fun.

However, after trying it out and winning big, he was forced to participate every year thereafter as the adults said "this year you will be defeated" in their quest for restored honor. Godou's successes were probably thanks to the tricks taught by the elderly distant relative who had been the subject of the legend of Kantou's strongest gambler in his youth.

Godou kept his winnings as rule-breaking "New Year's money" and saved it all up. This became something of a tradition.

Next New Year's, it's probably time they start giving me a break , thought Godou.

"So, make sure you're free next Saturday. Since her birthday will be here soon, do try to be more mindful of Shizuka-chan's affairs, okay?"

Asuka went home after offering this advice.

Well, Asuka's not that bad after all. Godou once again reaffirmed the qualities of his childhood friend.

Arriving back home, he found Shizuka who happened to be drinking tea in the living room.

"Ah, Onii-chan. Welcome home. You came back early today."

Seeing his sister, Godou suddenly had an idea. Why not try out Asuka's advice for once?

"Hey Shizuka, I'm going to be spending this coming weekend at a friend's place, so I probably won't be home from Friday to Sunday."

"Eh!? Onii-chan is staying outside overnight again!?"

As expected, Shizuka entered a rather dangerous mood.

"I'm sorry, there was something planned last week that couldn't be cancelled no matter what. However, I will be free on the 3rd of next month. Where should we go out for some fun? Let's also ask Asuka out as well since it's been a while."

December 3rd was the birthday of Kusanagi Shizuka.

Shizuka was unimpressed by Godou's sudden proposal.

"W-What do you think you're doing? Could it be, you are trying to use this to hide something!?"

"There's nothing to hide. Since I've been away from home so much recently, we haven't had as much time to spend together. Wouldn't it be nice once in a while?"

Godou recalled his childhood memories when the two of them would often play together.

Since both parents were always busy with work, the mother had moved back into her old home after the divorce, and so the grandfather became the "guardian," resulting in a decrease in opportunities for the siblings to spend time together alone.

This was one of the reasons why Shizuka was overly sensitive about her brother's conduct.

Perhaps in her mind, the brother was the only one who would never leave her side. But that was too naive a notion. Hence, Godou would try as much as possible to show her some care.

Finding her brother slightly repentant, Shizuka angrily turned her face away.

"Onii-chan is really terrible, saying something like this, you don't treasure me at all. I have plans too, so don't just suddenly say this kind of stuff."

"Suddenly? Isn't this advance enough in notice?"

"Despite how I look, I'm actually quite occupied. However, if Onii-chan repents your infamous poor conduct by that time and goes out with the little sister for some joyous fun, it's not like time can't be squeezed out from her schedule."

In other words, going out together was fine?

How troublesome of her. But then again, this style of speaking was very much in Shizuka's character. As he pondered how this obvious lack of honesty made her unbelievably cute, Godou replied:

"Ah yes, I've repented and changed my ways, so let's make things like old times once in a while, okay?"

"Hmph, suddenly saying something so reasonable, it's very suspicious. But it would be a shame if Onii-chan's repentance were to be wasted. Let's spend this year's birthday together. But you have to remember! If your conduct becomes strange again, I will mercilessly ignore you next year!"

The little sister declared as she furiously continued to keep her face turned away.

Godou replied "I'll remember." At the end of his wits, he displayed a smile at the same time.

And so Godou finally resolved all the pressing personal problems, and was prepared to set off.

At last, the weekend arrived — it was Friday after school.

Kusanagi Godou brought his luggage and left for Haneda Airport.

Accompanying him were the three girls, Erica Blandelli, Mariya Yuri and Liliana Kranjcar.

The destination was England's Heathrow Airport. Plane tickets and other preparations had all been arranged through the History Compilation Committee's hospitable efforts.

Towards London, for the sake of meeting the witch of the highest rank, Princess Alice. A journey began once more.

Chapter 2 - Affairs of the English Devil King

Part 1

The flight from Japan to England was more than twelve hours in duration.

Japan's time zone was nine hours ahead. When Godou's group departed from Haneda Airport, it was evening in Japan.

Having spent half a day rocking in a plane, they finally descended onto England's Heathrow Airport. However, it was still the same date as when they had left Japan.

—Leaving Japan on the 17:00 flight, they arrived in England at 21:00 on the same day.

Simply looking at the local departure and arrival times separately, it might appear to be a reasonable journey. However, this sort of troublesome time difference was shouldered by the travelers in the form of dizzying jet lag.

"No matter how many times I experience it, I still can't get used to it..."

Godou grumbled as he walked along the corridor in Heathrow Airport.

Due to jet lag, he was feeling dizzy and exhausted even though he had clearly slept throughout the flight.

All the travelers from east Asia to Europe experienced suffering. Amongst his fellow travelers, Yuri was exhausted to her limits, whereas Erica and Liliana were still functioning thanks to their superior physical endurance, but even they could not be described as especially energetic.

As a side note, London was extremely cold now that it was the latter half of November.

The three girls were all wearing winter clothing. Erica was dressed in a red collarless tweed coat and a tunic top with black leggings. Liliana was wearing a blue jacket, a short one-piece dress and black tights. Yuri was wearing a white duffel coat and dark gray pants.

"A hotel near the airport has already been booked. Let us head there to rest for today."

Liliana announced as she stood with her back perfectly straight.

Speaking in that stern tone no matter how tired she was, perhaps that could be considered one of her virtues?

"Let us rest well tonight in order to have energy tomorrow."

Godou nodded at Liliana's suggestion.

Whenever traveling long distance overseas, it was best to sleep according to the local daylight cycle in order to synchronize the biological clock and dispel the torments of jet lag.

"By the way, Erica-san, has permission to have an audience with Alice-sama — the Princess been obtained?"

"Yes. I already contacted her a few days ago."

Erica took out her cellphone as she replied to Yuri's query, most likely to check her text messages, and switched it on.

"Unless any problem arises, everything should go as planned. We will meet the Princess tomorrow... Oh my."

"What happened?"

"The Princess sent a message."

Everyone crowded together for a look at the screen of Erica's phone.

A message written in English. It must have been sent while they were on the plane.

'Oh what a disaster! Just when I received Erica's communication and was getting ready to convene with Kusanagi-sama (naturally I shall have to sneak out of the residence♪), Chief Lady-in-Waiting Miss Ericson was too vigilant.

I was originally in high spirits, but suddenly discovered she had cast a barrier around the residence to prevent me from escaping. Isn't that so mean!?

I must now revise my escape plans. Once I make a decision, I will contact you.

P.S. Why not simply have Kusanagi-sama destroy London? If such an event were to happen, I can immediately declare an anti-Devil King emergency at headquarters, thereby acquiring freedom of movement.'

"...She really sent this?"

Godou sighed as he recalled the dignified and lady-like impression he had of Alice.

As a message sent by a lady carrying the title of Princess, it contained way too many objectionable points.

Was her personality always this bubbly when online or sending messages? Or perhaps she simply forgot to maintain her usual facade?

"She's some sort of noblewoman from a duke's family... Right?"

"Yes. Her family is related to high ranking nobles on the European continent in olden days. She is also the renowned sage princess who has mastered the wisdom of the occult, with contacts amongst the descendants of druids as well as various magic associations descended from the lineages of the Knights Templar. She has also been described as Europe's highest ranking noblewoman, a woman who stands at the very pinnacle."

Pausing momentarily to recollect, Erica continued:

"Her health had always been frail, but her condition turned for the worse six years ago, so she resigned from her duties as the Witenagemot spokesperson to convalesce at a residence in London . Previously, she sighed to me that she could no longer leave the house freely due to her family's concerns over her heath."

"But last time with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, she came to Japan using a method like spirit body detachment, right?"

"Very likely, the barrier she mentioned at her residence is one which seals the movement of ectoplasm. In order to prevent the Princess from escaping."

Liliana answered as Godou wondered.

I see. But then again, in that case, it's fine even if she doesn't leave the house.

"Why don't we go to her house instead. It's no big deal, right? Erica, ask her that in your reply."

"Well Godou, we made a promise with the Princess."

Despite the reasonable suggestion, Erica shook her head.

"The Princess stated already. Since she agreed to provide full assistance to Kusanagi Godou during his visit to England, the Princess expects us to do all we can to help her 'go out.' Those are the terms of exchange."

"The Princess wants to leave the house at all costs... Will that be detrimental to her health?"

Yuri spoke softly as she worried for Alice's health.

Beside her, Liliana sighed briefly and said:

"Well, I am also worried about that. With that body even more delicate than a noblewoman's, I really wish she could settle down and wait quietly for us to visit instead..."

"Perhaps because she has always been raised in a sheltered environment, she is showing rebellious signs..."

"Is it simply rebelliousness...?"

As Erica mused, Godou muttered softly.

"In any case, we cannot let Godou-san destroy London. What should we do?"

"On the contrary. As long as we give the Princess a justified pretext, it's good enough."

Unexpectedly, Erica refuted Yuri's statement of moderation.

"Recently, the renown of Kusanagi Godou has increased greatly, which is good. Godou, I will inform her of our plans, so you can go ahead and put on a good show."

She had clearly thought up some kind of troublesome plan.

Oh well, this is for the purpose of seeing Alice, no other way around it. Godou sighed as he nodded, resigned to his fate.

"We'll have to get up early for the busy day tomorrow. Let's all hurry and get to bed."

"Speaking of getting up early, the one with the biggest problem is definitely you, Erica."

Seeing Erica beginning to issue orders haughtily, Godou could not help but retort.

Erica Blandelli was unable to get out of bed in the mornings unassisted. It had reached the point where someone had to take her to school every day. Nevertheless, the girl with the devil moniker smiled seductively:

"Oh my? That won't be a problem at all."

"How can you be so sure? For someone like you, even if the hotel's morning call service was used, you'd simply ignore it and keep sleeping."

"What are you talking about? Getting me out of bed in the mornings is obviously your duty."

Erica suddenly embraced Godou.

That elastic and amazingly voluptuous bosom and gorgeously supple body were tightly pressed against Godou.

"This is an uncommon chance to stay in a hotel on a rare trip. Naturally, we must share the same bed and enjoy a passionate night together as lovers should, right?"

"......W-What?"

Godou shuddered with extraordinary fright. By the way, this kind of situation—

Even though he had just noticed, was this not a desperate predicament? A notion suddenly flashed across Godou's mind. Think about this. A single male traveling with three girls, and in foreign lands as well. The trip last week to Kisarazu was similar, but at least there were History Compilation Committee members present at their lodgings.

This was totally a four-person expedition. Besides, the whole thing came out of his own planning.

Haven't I grown way too accustomed to these strange situations ?

Godou began to fear the situation he had personally created.

"...Traveling with everyone, but the only guy is me? Whether Amakasu-san, Kaoru-san, Yinghua, or people from the Committee, none of them are here, which means I'm the only one traveling with the rest?"

"Yes. Isn't that what you proposed in the first place, Godou?"

Hugging Godou's arm, Erica whispered in his ear.

Godou abruptly turned towards Yuri, making the quintessential Yamato Nadeshiko bow her head with a blush. She was embarrassed.

"I-Indeed, that is the situation. Godou-san. Invited by you, I could not possibly refuse..."

Mustering her courage, she murmured in a delicate and charming voice.

An ordinary group trip... Even with that description, there were too many sensational aspects. Godou suddenly felt like he had received a blunt knock on the head.

Then he turned his gaze to Liliana. The silver-haired knight showed calmness indicative of universal acceptance.

"I have sworn to assist you for a lifetime. No matter how unreasonable, I will put forth all my effort into fulfilling your orders... By the way, Erica. Is it not time for you to separate from Godou? That is about enough."

"Ah Lily. Embracing each other like this, affirming the touch of each other's existence, shouldn't that be allowed without any restriction? Don't say something so insensitive."

Staring back directly, Erica was unfazed by her childhood friend and rival's cold glare.

"Regardless, it is Godou himself who proposed taking us along with his expedition. Should I not act in accordance as his lover? Without a satisfying personal life, he won't be able to concentrate on work."

Feeling Erica's lips on his cheek, Godou began to curse his own stupidity.

It was not too late, act safely and cautiously! The first priority would be struggling free from Erica's tight embrace, for continuing to stay this close would be...

However, he could not even budge against Erica's magically enhanced arm strength.

Furthermore, Liliana was glaring reproachfully at her childhood friend and rival while casting admonishing gazes at Godou, filling him with apprehension.

If this continued, Yuri would probably start lecturing...

Even though the sensations of Erica's passionate embrace were very pleasurable, Godou felt like he was hugging explosives. Turning his gaze to Yuri, he was surprised to find the Hime-Miko deep in thought with a serious expression. Then she spoke slowly:

"This is not the first time for Erica-san to act in this manner... Perhaps it is a good opportunity after all. I have a suggestion for everyone."

What kind of situation is this? Godou felt uneasy.

"Before we left, I was worrying this would happen and it would develop into another argument like the time at Nikkou."

Yuri spoke with concern as she recalled what happened a few months ago.

A commotion had indeed occurred when Erica wanted to sleep with Godou. In order to deter her, Yuri and Liliana ended up staying with them in the same room...

"I feel that entering another disagreement over similar issues would be extremely foolish. After all, opportunities for us to travel together with Godou-san will only increase from now on... Hence, I think we should handle things in the following manner."

Yuri lifted her head with determination and swept her gaze across the group.

Hime-Miko — true to the title of "Hime," Yuri displayed a most solemn expression.

She was right. Godou felt relieved. Senseless commotions would only waste time and energy, so everyone needed to be reminded to act with propriety. This was very helpful of Yuri.

"Whenever we go traveling, everyone needs to stay in the same room... I think that should be established as the rule. Is this not the best method to eliminate contention?"

Oh my god, what happened to propriety...?

Godou was flabbergasted by the radical proposal which was the furthest thing from propriety. Nevertheless, to his utter surprise, Erica and Liliana began to ponder Yuri's proposal in earnest.

Part 2

Ah, the sunshine is so bright...

Watching the rising sun through the hotel window, Godou was using the sofa as a bed. Having maintained his reason and sanity throughout so many crises, Godou was a bit impressed with himself...

Liliana had made a booking at the hotel.

But thanks to Erica's meddling, the booking had been changed.

Originally, there was an additional room as proper for separation by gender. As a male, Godou was not going to spend the night in the same room with three girls. However, that booking was cancelled. Instead, a spacious room with only a single large size double bed had been arranged for the whole group...

And so, one night passed—

Currently, three beautiful maidens were deep in their dreams, lying on the double bed.

Obviously, they were Erica, Yuri and Liliana. The extra size bed was more than ample for the three slender girls. Seeing them get along so well, it was a sight that brought a smile to one's face.

However, Godou only glanced briefly before averting his gaze immediately.

The girls' uncouth sleeping postures were so troubling he could not bear to watch.

Even though Yuri and Liliana were wearing nightgowns, the lower hems had been displaced by random movements in their sleep, revealing bare legs in their dazzling white glory.

Naturally, Erica was the same as usual, sleeping in her underwear, wrapped in a blanket.

Her sleeping appearance was not very graceful, but being able to see her in such a vulnerable and honest state was quite a treat.

Cornered by such a scene, Godou felt his sanity being assaulted. With three beautiful girls, their attack power was tripled, or rather, cubed.

"Thanks... Thanks to that, I woke up this early..."

Watching the morning sunshine, Godou muttered to himself.

Last night, after hearing Yuri's proposal...

"Indeed... Though it sounded rather radical at first, it is in actual fact quite a reasonable idea. If everyone is gathered in one place, we can keep an eye on each other."

That was Liliana's response as she glared at Erica who continued to embrace Godou.

"Well, it's true from the perspective of equal opportunity. This idea is not bad."

Erica consented with a slightly bored expression, still tightly pressed against Godou.

Despite the adamant protests of the leader Godou, all the girls ignored him. Thereafter, nothing noteworthy occurred.

Besides the likes of Godou trying to flee but being foiled by Erica's casting of [Locking] magic on the door.

Or the intense heart racing caused by the girls taking baths or changing.

Or being exhausted by the long journey, only to find the bed occupied by three sprawling girls.

Or things like Erica's tempting "why not sleep together?", Yuri and Liliana's profound gazes, being embroiled in various arguments. In the end, Godou slept by himself on the lonely sofa couch. Unable to enter slumber, he suffered lying awake until late into the night.

Completely unnoteworthy, right?

In any case, morning came to the hotel at Heathrow Airport.

"Coffee... Let me find something to drink."

Getting up from the couch, Godou muttered.

"If you wish, let me prepare it? ...Godou-san?"

"Since we came to England, how about some tea? The equipment is here."

Voices came from behind.

Godou turned to find Yuri and Liliana getting up from bed.

"I'm sorry, was I too loud?"

"Do not be concerned. Today will be a busy day and I had intended to get up early."

"Yes, same for me."

Yuri nodded in agreement with Liliana. The two began to prepare tea together using the teapot and tea ware provided in the room.

Like Japanese hotels, most English hotels were also equipped to make tea.

Looking at the girls' appearance, Godou felt rather worried.

The two of them were still in their nightgowns. Yuri's usually meticulously combed hair was slightly ruffled by sleep while Liliana's long silver hair was unbound from her usual ponytail.

In other words, this was a sight normally reserved for family.

Except maybe close friends for occasional sleepovers, or intimate couples...

"By the way, Mariya Yuri. I really like your idea, it is a bit unlike your usual style."

While brewing tea, Liliana suddenly spoke.

"Ah, yes. In actual fact, it occurred to me when Ena-san was telling me about what happened during the time we were turned into stone."

"Ah, that time."

The silver-haired knight nodded at Yuri's answer.

It was a completely natural conversation, but Godou somehow felt uneasy. Perhaps it was the mention of the unaware troublemaker, Seishuuin Ena.

"During the incident last week, Godou-san and Ena-san spent a night together under the same blanket in the same room at the same inn... Ena-san told me with great embarrassment. As all sorts of thoughts and feelings converged, I came up with this proposal... "

"......Hmph. Is that so?"

Hearing Yuri's mournful confession, Liliana muttered monotonously.

Then she brought the readied tea over to Godou.

"It is ready, drink up while it is hot."

"T-Thanks. Looks delicious."

"No. These are not quality tea leaves so I expect the taste to be average. Anyway, Kusanagi Godou, now that I think about it, I have forgotten to hear your detailed report about the events during our petrification. As your premier knight, this is an inexcusable oversight. My utmost apologies."

Liliana's apology felt very business-like and imposing. Godou steadied himself.

"...In order for me to reflect thoroughly, please do enlighten me. Tell me the details of what transpired during the night Mariya Yuri and I were petrified. Is that fine?"

Godou turned to glance at the clock. There were still two or three hours until breakfast.

During this time, there was apparently no way to escape Liliana's interrogation. A crisis indeed.

On the other hand, Erica remained sound asleep despite the current atmosphere.

The sight of her face in peaceful slumber made Godou incredibly jealous.

After enduring the exhausting morning, Godou finally managed to appease Liliana's wrath.

The group went for breakfast once Erica slowly crept out of bed.

The traditional English breakfast was known for its sumptuous abundance. The hotel where Godou's group stayed was one which maintained such a custom.

Offerings included fried eggs and crispy bacon, grilled tomatoes , hash browns, baked beans with mushrooms, sausages, thinly-sliced toast, etc...

A morning meal with a wide assortment of food.

Yuri could not finish everything with her small appetite, but the other three made an excellent display of their bottomless stomachs, clearing everything out without wastage — not simply due to the quantity, for the taste was rather good as well.

After breakfast, the group left the hotel and took a taxi cab.

The ride from Heathrow to London took a few dozens of minutes. As planned originally, Godou's destination was Greenwich in the suburbs rather than the tourist attractions in London's city center.

Without needing to drive towards the usual tourist attractions, the taxi made its way rather quickly.

"A rare chance for me to visit England, what a pity."

Godou muttered to himself as he sat on the passenger side next to the driver.

As his first visit to this foreign capital, it was only natural to want to go for a sightseeing tour.

However, he was alone in that regard. Whether Erica, Liliana or even Yuri, all of them had been to London too many times in the past.

Very soon, the raging currents of the River Thames came into view.

Godou had heard of the famed river numerous times. Greenwich was a little town next to the Thames.

Getting off the taxi, Erica led the way at her usual familiar pace.

Everyone followed.

Greenwich was the little town known for the famous Royal Observatory. Established in the seventeenth century as the zeroth degree longitude, the observatory was the basis for Greenwich Mean Time.

There were other worthwhile attractions such as the National Maritime Museum and Greenwich Park. This was also the location of the organization where Princess Alice once served as the spokesperson — the Witenagemot's headquarters.

"Unlike our respective organizations, the [Bronze Black Cross] and the [Copper Black Cross], the Witenagemot of Greenwich is not a magic association. An extreme description would be something like a mutual aid society."

Liliana explained as they walked in the little town.

"Mutual aid society?"

"Yes. It was originally a simple organization where members exchanged occult knowledge, thereby obtaining insight from one another. Whenever a member's research stagnated in progress, the others would offer financial or academic assistance."

I see, so it's really like a mutual aid society. Godou understood now.

"As time went on, the Witenagemot established many independent research organizations one after another, and became a great authority especially with the founding of the Academy, thus engendering its current unique position... Furthermore, the Witenagemot was established in the nineteenth century during England's Victorian era. At the time, they were forced to continually strengthen the organization in order to survive."

"In order to survive... Sounds quite dangerous."

Godou puzzled over Liliana's explanation.

Standing beside him, Yuri shuddered slightly as she spoke:

"Back then, London was where that person — Dejanstahl Voban lived. Reportedly, he was enjoying city life in the rapidly developing capital of the British Empire..."

"Eh, that old gramps?"

The demon who viewed gods as prey and caused other Devil Kings to tremble before him.

The memories of the old Marquis who maintained a facade of intellect over his true "bestial" nature were still extremely vivid.

"Back then when he was still a young man, he reportedly went to pay a formal visit to Queen Victoria just for fun."

"In order to protect England and the queen from the Marquis' threat, the Witenagemot began to devote serious resources to researching the Devil King Campiones. This is actually quite a famous incident."

Liliana recounted it as a legend, but Yuri unexpectedly knew the inside story.

Staying in the same city and living under the shadow of that monster must have been suffering. Godou offered his condolences to Alice's predecessors.

"Great, we've arrived. Hurry and get ready."

Erica called out to everyone as she stopped before a certain pub.

So this was an English pub? Godou was a bit impressed as he followed Erica. Naturally, Yuri and Liliana came along as well.

The pub was rather ancient but kept very clean and tidy.

There was a wondrous relaxing atmosphere inside the dim interiors. The evenings were probably filled with nearby men gathering for fish and chips, drinking beer, chatting, and watching soccer matches.

However, it was currently morning.

There were no other people apart from the middle-aged man who was preparing to open the place.

Greeting Erica cheerfully, he welcomed Godou attentively with a fearful gaze as he led everyone inside.

"Was the guy just now one of Erica's comrades?"

"He is a member of the [Copper Black Cross] who is stationed at Greenwich. My association has personnel distributed all over Europe in this manner to receive the latest news on the Witenagemot... So Godou, please act in the manner you have agreed to."

Opening the lid of a notebook computer at the cashier, Erica replied.

"It can't be helped... Fine, I will try."

It was too late to back out. Godou's voice was low and gloomy.

In less than twenty minutes, the door to the pub opened and a Caucasian woman in her latter thirties entered.

Wearing thin-rimmed glasses, her demeanor was the complete embodiment of a strict governess.

"I was invited to pay a visit. But how unexpected for His Highness the Devil King to come to London personally..."

The one greeting in a trembling voice, was Miss Ericson indeed.

She was the Chief Lady-in-Waiting employed in service of Princess Alice who lived in London's high class residential neighborhood. Last night, Erica had contacted her through her business cellphone, and set up an appointment in the name of Kusanagi Godou.

Also, the Princess who had given this phone number only disclosed her name.

"Kusanagi Godou-sama. For what purpose have you come to visit this land?"

Miss Ericson spoke as she glared at Godou.

What impressive boldness. However, a closer inspection revealed a certain stiffness in her expression, as if she was rather tense from having to engage a tyrannical(?) Devil King in a private conversation.

"Yes — nice to meet you. Actually I have a task I hope you could perform as quickly as possible. I'm quite sorry to call you out expressly..."

Godou answered as he secretly cursed his deficient acting skills.

Before they left the hotel, Erica had taught him "to speak this way." Without using too much acting, he was to take things cool and steady.

"W-We of the Witenagemot will not bow down to the tyranny of the Devil King Campione!"

"Is that so? But as you should know, such stubbornness, in regards to both our sides, will not result in a favorable outcome, right...?"

Godou spoke in a stiff tone of voice he rarely used.

Probably due to the awkwardness he was trying to suppress in his heart. He felt really apologetic for saying such things to someone in their first encounter. I really should find a time to apologize afterwards. Godou thought to himself as he continued:

"What I would like to say is this, I have actually not said anything too unreasonable. I just want to ask gently if you would kindly listen to our wish, that is all..."

As he finished delivering his dry speech, he found Erica had made her way behind Miss Ericson.

Standing at a spot out of sight from the strict Chief Lady-in-Waiting, Erica held up a sketchbook.

Something was written on it...

'You need to act more like a Devil King, show some majestic solemnity when you speak! Don't mess up this rare chance to debut in England! You have to announce to the world: I, Kusanagi Godou, have arrived!'

...I'm gonna ignore it.

Coughing to clear his throat, Godou asked "How about that?"

At this moment, a beauty's face appeared on the screen of the notebook computer at the cashier. In fact, it was a video conference program that had just started up.

The beauty possessing dazzling platinum blonde hair was Princess Alice, of course.

'Well! Why have you come to this place, Campione? Could it be that you have come all the way from Japan to cause chaos by destroying London!?'

Alice's beautiful face shimmered with awesome splendor.

She was really enjoying herself, playing the role of the " highborn princess who raged with a great sense of mission" perfectly.

...Or maybe, she should probably act with greater prudence.

'I will not tolerate such actions! Miss Ericson, please dispel the barrier at the residence immediately. I implore you to allow me, Alice Louise of Navarre, the former spokesperson of the Witenagemot, to have an audience with the Devil King in person to negotiate directly.'

The Princess commanded her Chief Lady-in-Waiting through the notebook computer over the internet.

However, this shout only served to return Miss Ericson to her senses. She calmly adjusted her glasses and said:

"...Princess. Why have you appeared during my meeting with Kusanagi-sama in what could be described as an unnatural manner with such perfect timing?"

'Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Worry about these minor details later!'

"These are no mere minor details. It is a most serious problem. Could it be possible that the Princess has made some sort of shady deal with the Devil King Campione!? First there was Alexandre Gascoigne, then Italy's Sir Salvatore Doni recently! How unrepentant!"

'Uhohoho, what was that? Well, Kusanagi-sama, tell me your demands. If you can spare London in exchange for my person, I will pay you a visit no matter where you are!'

"Yes, well... It's not like I want to do anything violent, but I would be most appreciative if you could come out to meet me."

Clumsily reacting in concert with the Princess, Godou spoke emotionlessly.

In the end, under the Princess's threat of "the Devil King will attack London and bring chaos unless she is liberated," Miss Ericson relented with a bitter expression, thereby bringing the commotion to a conclusion.

Part 3

Dozens of minutes passed after Miss Ericson had left.

A dashing beauty made her appearance in the pub where Godou was waiting.

Wearing a white weightless-looking long coat, it was the princess with platinum blonde hair. Suffice to say, this was Princess Alice.

"Please accept my utmost gratitude for freeing up this time for me."

Alice greeted elegantly as she gazed into Godou's face.

Her current dignified presence was just as unbelievable as the enthusiastic display just now. Well, to be overly critical of that point would be a bit too tactless. Acting as if nothing had happened, Godou said:

"Is it really okay for your health if you visit personally?"

"Yes. As Kusanagi-sama knows, I am using that certain ability. My body remains at rest in bed, so don't worry."

That certain ability — spirit body detachment. Godou nodded.

Having revealed her secret, Alice grinned mischievously then turned to all the girls present to display a bright and cheerful smile .

"It's been quite some time, Erica! Of course I would never forget you all. Liliana of the Kranjcar family, as well as Kusanagi-sama's attendant Yuri. Fufufu, my memory's not bad, right?"

Greeted by the noblewoman, Erica smiled elegantly.

Yuri frantically shrank back and nodded in acknowledgement while Liliana silently bowed her head.

None of the three girls spoke. They were expressing their noninterference in Godou and Alice — the negotiations between the Devil King and the former spokesperson of the Witenagemot.

Furthermore, there was an implied expression of reverence for the one known as Europe's White Miko-Hime, the most noble celebrity in the magic world. No matter how cheerfully she had tried to strike up conversation, the difference in stature was obvious — this was the most likely reason for expressing respect.

At the same time, Alice very naturally accepted the respect offered by Erica and the rest.

This was not acting haughty or overbearing. For Alice who stood as a "Hime," it was only natural. Whether acting emotional and reckless on occasion, or upfront and straightforward on others , this was her character that accepted such offers of respect.

As befitted a princess, thought Godou, deeply impressed.

"By the way, Kusanagi-sama. I heard from Erica that Alexandre stole an unidentified divine artifact from Japan—"

Alice spoke as she walked over with Godou to a table and sat down.

The other three girls stayed by the cash register.

"Yeah. Anyway, I think I need to have a serious word with him after I take care of the Lancelot problem first... Perhaps, this could very well develop into an extremely messy affair."

An eye for an eye, wasn't that right? After all, the other guy was the instigator.

Kusanagi Godou was a pacifist. However, he was not a believer in nonresistance. Even if there existed an option of appeasement, he would not give up on retaliation.

"Well, it's expected of you. Yes, it wouldn't be interesting otherwise!"

"Eh?"

Hearing her jest-filled statement, Godou stared directly into Alice face.

At the same time, Europe's most exalted noblewoman smiled elegantly.

"No, it's just something on my side. Don't be concerned. Anyway, Kusanagi-sama, would you like to listen to my advice?"

"Yes, of course. What is it?"

Princess Alice possessed extraordinary spirit powers and insight. Godou had caught a glimpse of her talents during the fight against his sworn elder sister Her Eminence Luo Hao. He proceeded to adjust his sitting posture.

"Kusanagi-sama has either made friends with or already battled several of my friends... Sir Salvatore, Marquis Voban, Her Eminence Luo Hao, John Pluto Smith-sama etc. You should know very well what truly unreasonable existences Campiones are."

Definitely. Godou naturally recalled his fellow peers who all possessed way too much personality.

As Godou nodded, Alice spoke with slight concern:

"Compared to the others, Alexandre is decisively different. As a result, you may at first find him much easier to deal with compared to the other Devil Kings. However, please be careful for this becomes a trap when fighting him."

"A decisive difference?"

"Yes. The previous Campiones you have fought, each and every one of them is quite old fashioned — or rather, legendary. They are essentially mighty heroes who do not concern themselves with petty details. Though they may employ cunning tactics on occasion, ultimately they depend on natural instincts and impulses . They all harbor a bestial competitiveness that modern humans have long forgotten, a group of people who slays gods through momentary passion..."

Indeed, they were all people of that sort.

Alice's assessment of "old-fashioned." What an interesting perspective indeed.

"Hence, Alexandre is the only one who retains traits of modern humans. His neurotic personality obsesses over details. Naturally sharp instincts yet a strategist. Even though his extraordinary competitiveness drives him to hate failure with a passion, that kind of bestial feeling he gives off is slightly different."

Black Prince Alec and White Princess Alice were archrivals.

Recalling Erica's words, Godou concurred with a "uh huh." I see , since they had dealt with each other over such a long period of time, she could recall the details of her opponent's personality instantly.

"That man neither possesses the same magnanimity as Marquis Voban, nor Her Eminence Luo Hao's otherworldly logic, nor Smith-sama's sense of mystery. However, underestimating him based on these observations would be falling into his trap. He is a rare person who possesses a fine intellect but never uses it for anything proper!"

"But I think he saved you once before, right?"

Based on Alice's reluctant expression, it must be true.

The Princess seemed embarrassed by past shame, and nodded gently.

"I feel ashamed every time I recall it... Alexandre probably cannot reach the heights of Genghis Khan or King Richard the Lionheart, but he can definitely become someone like Napoleon Bonaparte. He also has a reputation like Arsene Lupin's. That is the kind of [King] he is. Please bear that in mind."

Godou understood what the Princess was trying to say.

The Black Prince could not indulge in merciless slaughter to become a great barbaric hero or a valorous king of knights.

On the other hand, he rivaled modern military geniuses and was a man who brought to life the archetype of the gentlemanly thief from adventure novels. What kind of Campione was he ultimately?

Imagining the appearance of this intimidating foe, Godou secretly trembled with excitement.

"Anyway, Alice-san, shouldn't we get to the main topic of discussion?"

Before everything else, Godou had another formidable enemy to handle first, so he changed the subject.

"If it's alright with you, please tell me about Lancelot. I heard from Liliana that he is the guardian god of witches like you."

"Yes. Kusanagi-sama came to visit for this very reason."

Alice pondered as she spoke softly.

"However, I must apologize. Indeed, he is the guardian deity of the highest ranking witches. However, this does not mean that we have access to the details of his origins."

"It's like that?"

"Yes. Starting from the Middle Ages, top witches established their own network and had regular gatherings like the " Walpurgisnacht."[5] The one who founded this network was the

Witch Queen of that time, the previous generation's Guinevere-sama."

"Previous generation's Guinevere!?"

"Yes. The present Guinevere-sama, is the second generation reincarnated several decades ago."

"The first generation in the Middle Ages, and the second in the modern age... What a long interval."

"The rebirth of Divine Ancestors requires centuries to complete. That's probably the reason."

Rebirth required centuries. So the immortal witch apparently had a weakness.

As Godou noted to himself, Alice continued:

"The first generation's Guinevere was born several centuries after the prototype of King Arthur's legend, the 'King of the End,' went into dormant slumber. She was then murdered around the end of the twelfth century. As her protector, Lancelot also ' conveniently' guards top witches under her command."

"—Eh?"

Godou was shocked by Alice's calm disclosure.

Her statement just now, seemed to be filled with incomparably crucial facts...

"The 'King of the End' who was the prototype of King Arthur? Isn't he the mortal enemy of us Campiones, who manifests at the end of eras?"

"Well, if Kusanagi-sama already knows about him, this greatly simplifies what I need to explain. Much appreciated."

Alice smiled lightly.

"Is that 'King of the End' King Arthur?"

"No, he's not."

The question that cut straight to the crux of the matter, was nonchalantly refuted. What on earth was going on?

"When Heretic Arthur appeared six years ago, we were able to disprove the notion. Thanks to that, the second generation's Guinevere-sama entered a state of partial insanity, which is most terrible... When Alexandre's hypothesis that 'the King of the End is actually not King Arthur' was confirmed, that smug face of his was just asking for a beating, it makes me so mad every time I think of it!"

Clenching her fist, Alice grumbled.

At the same time, the girls who had been silent so far began to get excited.

"Did King Arthur really become a [Heretic God], Princess!?"

"And six years ago!?"

Erica and Liliana were shocked.

Not only as Europeans but knights as well, the importance with which they regarded the name of King Arthur was probably impossible for Japanese like Godou or Yuri to fathom.

Alice smiled mischievously as she explained to the red and blue knights.

"Yes. Since it's a long story, I'll show you later the report from that time. However, don't go telling anyone, okay? Even within the Witenagemot, only members of the Diogenes Club are privy to this secret."

"Understood." The knights replied with reverence.

Nodding in acknowledgement, Alice turned back to Godou.

"Let's get back to the topic and talk about the war god Lancelot. Amongst the stories of the Knights of the Round Table, Sir Lancelot's episodes were all creations based on the first Guinevere's knowledge of King Arthur's myth... In particular, a number of characters were added based on Chrétien de Troyes' works. As a result, these myths are completely unhelpful in regard to deciphering the original divinity of Lancelot."

The Princess nonchalantly entered the main subject.

Seeking her assistance was the correct decision — Godou was deeply impressed.

"How about this? Visit the lands related to him, to understand what kind of god he is — the best plan is to clear your thoughts and humbly open yourself to the truth. Kusanagi-sama, you already hold the corresponding trump card in your hand."

Saying that, Alice turned her gaze to the girl who had maintained silence.

The miko with the highest level of spirit vision, Mariya Yuri. The beauty with the brown-tinted black hair nodded towards at the Princess' words. Only at this time did Godou suddenly notice.

Alice was English while Yuri was native to Japan.

Nevertheless, both of them gave off an aura that was similar in a certain way.

"Let's visit Somerset first, Yuri. Go there and feel those claw marks carved and left behind by the Witch Queen and Lancelot du Lac."

"Yes, I shall do as you suggest."

Yuri's unhesitating answer elicited a gentle smile from Alice.

"Hohoho, no problem. I'm certain you will feel something. I also plan on tagging along to provide assistance."

"Eh? Even the Princess herself!?"

"Ah, no need. You don't have to go so far."

Seeing Yuri intimidated, Godou hurriedly tried to refuse.

However, Princess Alice responded in a loud voice:

"No problem! If I had to articulate it, this is my personal interest . If I don't take a stroll once in a while, I feel like my bones are going to rot."

"Huh..."

"Actually from a while ago, I've been thinking of teaching Yuri some basics. Since this will be a good opportunity, let us get along well together during our travels."

She did not seem like she would take no for an answer. Godou had no choice but to accept her request.

"With regard to Guinevere-sama and Lancelot, I will also tell you everything I know about them... Well, even though Alexandre was the one who elucidated most of it."

Alice spoke with slight displeasure.

"Really, for that person to display exceptional talent in such an area. Pitting wits against him is always such a pain!"

Gascoigne again? Godou somehow felt a vague sense of uneasiness.

Campiones were god-slaying warriors. However, Black Prince Alec was different. He was the adventurer who had solved numerous mysterious riddles, and a resourceful strategist at the same time. A talented man who flew like the wind with thunderous ferocity and a genius who acted with decisive willfulness...

Godou had a feeling that he would one day suffer for it if Gascoigne was not dealt with soon.

However, his first priority was uncovering the mystery of Lancelot—

Consciously ignoring that restless unease, Godou directed himself to solve the pressing problem at hand.

Part 4

Alice's chosen destination of Somerset county was located in southwestern England.

It was a well-known tourist destination for communing with nature. In other words, it was largely non-metropolitan and dominated by picturesque rural and agricultural scenery.

"Come to think of it, isn't the county where Gascoigne established his faction's stronghold nearby?"

"Yes. West of Somerset, a museum in a little town called St. Ives located in England's westernmost region of Cornwall. A town inhabited by many artists, with numerous art galleries and museums."

Somerset was three hours away from London by car.

Sitting in a car racing along the highway, Alice said:

"Although it has nothing to do with this trip, why don't we go the extra mile and have a look? Even if we visit [Royal Arsenal] right away, it should be empty."

"Empty?"

"Yes. Alexandre would never give meaningless orders to his subordinates such as defending against or intercepting a Campione's attack. Instead he would most likely command them all to retreat swiftly."

This car was a limousine provided by Alice.

The driving was assigned to a professional driver while Godou and the rest sat in the back seats.

There was a divider isolating the driver from the passenger area . Sitting in a row opposite Alice and Godou were Erica, Liliana and Yuri. However, there would still be plenty of room even if everyone were to stretch their legs straight.

Within the spacious vehicle, Erica and Liliana were reading the information Alice had provided to them.

"This is the report concerning [Heretic Arthur]..."

"Did such a serious incident happen six years ago..."

"During that particular incident, Guinevere-sama lost all the magical power stored in the Holy Grail. After that, we were able to seal Heretic Arthur away through Alexandre and my combined power. At the very least, one could conclude 'all's well that ends well.'"

Alice sighed as she explained.

"For that person to have returned, and caused the incident in Japan last week... Kusanagi-sama, through that incident, we of the Witenagemot have confirmed a certain principle."

"Principle?"

"Yes. That principle is this: when a [Heretic God] descends upon the human world, the body and mind take form based on ' myths.' In other words, when myths change, a god's nature will be altered accordingly."

It seemed like Alice was about to start giving a lecture on Lancelot.

Godou began to sit up straight to listen attentively as soon as he caught Alice's serious tone of voice.

"For example, suppose there was a war god who was renowned as the 'greatest knight' in this world. However, a thousand years ago, that was not his true identity. So, what would happen if that deity were to descend tomorrow—"

"Would he descend as 'the greatest knight'?"

"That's right. Nevertheless, suppose he had descended as a [Heretic God] fifteen centuries ago... Even if the myths change, there will be no effect and he will continue to exist in the human world, maintaining the divinity he started with."

"...So, you're talking about Lancelot after all?"

"Yes. To understand Sir Lancelot, three obstacles need to be overcome. First of all, he was a god who manifested over a thousand years ago. Secondly, throughout these one thousand years and more, all the myths intimately linked to him have been lost, making investigations extremely difficult. Third and last of all , many people have 'created' new myths about him as the 'greatest knight' and spread them far and wide, further obscuring the truth. "

Godou recalled a name that Alice had mentioned at Greenwich.

"Earlier you mentioned someone called Chret-something, right? "

"Yes. Chrétien de Troyes. The twelfth-century troubadour who wrote the first stories where Lancelot appeared. He was most likely a mage descended from the lineages of the Knights Templar and is suspected of colluding with the Witch Queen of that time, the first Guinevere."

"Eh!?"

"He and his companions were the ones who added Guinevere-sama and Sir Lancelot as major characters in the new Arthurian legends. As a result, trying to discern Sir Lancelot's original divinity from the stories of the Knights of the Round Table becomes extremely difficult..."

Investigating the details surrounding Lancelot turned out to be a much tougher mission than expected. Godou went "Hmm..." as he hugged his shoulders, deep in thought, then he looked at Yuri.

"Yes. Consequently, this child's spirit vision becomes exceedingly important. Hohoho. So, we shall be relying on you, Yuri?"

"Y-Yes! I fully pledge my humble efforts... But I cannot be certain if I may be of help..."

"No problem. I can guarantee you that. Ah, but don't ask why. All I can say is, it's female intuition."

The Princess smiled gently as Yuri cringed timidly. Her tone of voice was rather subtle, seemingly straddling the line between joking and being serious.

After that, Alice did not discuss anything more about practical matters.

Ending the explanations for Godou, the Princess began to chat cheerfully with Erica, Liliana and Yuri. Perhaps she was worried about the Hime-Miko's mental stress.

The car made its way speedily without congestion, then exited the highway and entered local roads.

Looking out the window, green pastures were everywhere. Gentle rolling hills traced curves over the land, creating undulating patterns.

Amidst this farmland scenery, Godou noticed something suspicious.

"What was that just now?"

In the corner of an abandoned field they had just passed through, there was a massive stone structure.

It was constructed out of three rectangular stones, in a manner like a house of cards — using two massive stones as pillars with one lying horizontally on top. Each stone must have weighed several tons.

"Come to think of it, I've seen similar things in Sardinia."

"That's right, Godou. Monoliths left behind by prehistoric European natives called dolmens. Many of them can be found on Sardinia as well as the mainland. Yes, there was also one near the place where we encountered the god Melqart."

"...Ah yes, that one!"

Prompted by Erica, Godou's memories were reawakened.

"The various monoliths scattered across Britain are believed to have been constructed by indigenous peoples between the end of the Neolithic Age and the Bronze Age, even earlier than the arrival of the Celts. Similar types of monoliths can be found on the European continent — especially in the region of Brittany in France."

Alice explained from beside Godou.

"Crossing the sea from Cornwall reaches Brittany directly. Even for an island country isolated by the ocean, culture will be influenced by communication and trade with the mainlanders. This is proof of that."

Just as the conversation reached this point, the car stopped in the wilderness.

One of the passenger doors in the back opened, indicating the destination had been reached. First Erica then Liliana, followed by Godou and Yuri, with Alice last — everyone got off in turn.

A survey of the surroundings found fields all around. Other than the new arrivals, not a single soul was in sight.

Furthermore, the monolith standing upright in this scene—

This one turned out to be round. Not like a sphere, but a massive circle roughly ten meters in diameter. A hole was drilled through its center with magnificent workmanship, making it look like a ring made of rock.

This massive ring of stone stood upright in the middle of the wilderness.

What a majestic and astonishing sight.

"...White Goddess—? And the King of War...?"

Suddenly, Yuri began to speak softly.

With shaking footsteps, she walked towards the toroidal monolith.

"Monolithic civilization is the heritage left behind by indigenous peoples. Hence, monoliths like this were preserved for future ages and inherited by later peoples who took over Britain."

Watching Yuri who was walking towards the massive stone, Alice explained.

"It was said that whether the Celts, the Romans or the Saxons, all of them firmly believed these monoliths to be sacred objects and sacred places, or even gods themselves, and thus they protected them."

Finally, Yuri touched the toroidal monolith.

The Hime-Miko's gentle and beautiful face showed a wise expression as she closed her eyes.

"Six years ago, during the 'Heretic Arthur Incident,' Guinevere-sama and Sir Lancelot held a major ritual at this location for the sake of releasing the Holy Grail's magical power to the maximum. There should still be some remnants of their aura in this place. I was hoping 'if it's Yuri, will she be able to read something?' when I suggested coming here."

As Godou listened carefully to Alice, Yuri opened her eyes once more.

Then she collapsed, as if all strength had been stolen from her knees, making her unable to stand. It appeared that the oracle obtained through spirit vision was quite draining.

"Mariya!" "Get a hold of yourself, Yuri!" "Did you see something !?"

Godou frantically ran to her as Erica and Liliana also gathered around.

Godou cradled the Hime-Miko's back with his arm, trying to support her. Liliana also extended a helping hand immediately. At this time, Yuri smiled weakly and said:

"The White Goddess, as well as the opposing King of War. I then saw the name Sarmatae... Could that be the name of an ancient country?"

"No. Sarmatae... Also known as Sarmatia, was not a country—"

"The name of an ancient tribe. Yes, since Lancelot belongs to the most primitive of [Steel], of course that would be the place...!"

Erica and Liliana replied excitedly to Yuri's whispers. It seemed like it was a name within the knights' expectations. Just as Godou felt thankful as he carried Yuri on his back to return to the car...

VROOOOOOOOOOM!

The loud and dynamic sound of vehicle exhaust could be heard.

Following the direction of the noise, a large motorcycle could be seen approaching.

It was a Harley-Davidson. The rider was wearing a black leather jacket and leather pants, along with shades. The helmet had no visor and looked like an iron hat. It was an appearance that adhered faithfully to the image of the stereotypical Harley rider.

"What is that man doing here? He sure does not look like some new age hippy coming to a power spot to pray for luck..."

"Could that be Esteemed Uncle!?"

Just as Liliana muttered to herself in doubt, Erica exclaimed with surprise.

The Harley stopped right before Godou's group as the black-clad rider took off his helmet and dismounted, walking into their midst.

"As I thought... It's been a while, Esteemed Uncle Iceman."

"You've grown to become even more beautiful, Erica. I didn't realize since we've only been talking on the phone lately. Even though it's been many years and I've got lots to talk with the niece of my enemy Paolo, let's leave it for another time. Today I came to deliver a message."

The man took off his shades as he answered in a tone of voice carrying great meaning.

The handsome and solemn face of a Caucasian in his mid-thirties was revealed.

"A pleasure to meet you for the first time, Kusanagi Godou. I am the retainer of Alexandre Gascoigne, Iceman... Ah, and of course, it is my pleasure to meet you again, Princess."

This man was Sir Iceman whom Erica had mentioned before.

Why did he come here? As Godou wondered, the legendary knight handed him a letter.

"Please accept this letter which our commander-in-chief Alec had sent to us by magic and ordered to be delivered to you."

"He expressly sent this to me? What on earth is it?"

Reading the letter, Godou was stunned.

'This humble one recently decided to execute a little plan. With regard to this, I have repeatedly warned you, asking you to watch without interference. Reckless action is meaningless. I shall warn you once more, I hope you will stand back and watch things unfold. Whether curiosity, nosiness, heroism, human impulse, or thrill-seeking, all interference stemming from such emotions will not be welcomed.

P.S. If it pleases you, how about a little vacation with your lovers at my hometown of Cornwall? It is only dutiful for me to order my subordinates to welcome your arrival. We have already confirmed arrangements, and hope you can enjoy our hospitality for a month or two.'

It was a letter written using old fashioned Japanese.

"Telling me to do nothing and just have fun in England? Give me a break!"

Just as Godou scrunched the letter up into a ball, his cellphone began ringing in his pocket.

However, things must be made clear to Iceman first. Let me ignore the phone for now.

"Perhaps it might be related to Alec's intentions. Why not pick it up first?"

Sir Iceman suggested cautiously.

Intentions? Yet another dangerous word. Godou picked up the call.

It was Amakasu Touma. It seemed to be an international long distance call from Japan.

'What a disaster, Kusanagi-san. In the waters near Bousou with its unending succession of recent commotions, this time a castle of strange rock has been built!'

"...Strange rock, what are you talking about?"

'A castle of strange rock. In the very center of Tokyo Bay, it suddenly floated up like an island. An island covered with steep and treacherous rocks, and also surrounded by a rocky reef. It emanates an intense presence similar to an RPG boss' castle of the devil king. It gives off such a terrifying and foreboding impression. '

A sudden inauspicious report.

Sir Iceman proceeded to speak in a very honest voice:

"Seems like Alexandre Gascoigne has put his plan into motion. Whether you wish to stand back and watch, or hurry back to Japan ... It's up to you. Personally, for the sake of world peace, I recommend the former."

So that castle of strange rock really was the Black Prince's doing!? Because he was left alone to roam free, others were suffering from it!

Godou was completely stunned by the accuracy of his unease several hours ago.

Chapter 3 - Two Kings, Encounter

Part 1

Reportedly, a particular hypothesis was proposed six years ago.

The location of delivery was in France, at the little port town of Saint-Malo in the region of Brittany.

A well-known vacation destination situated near the tidal island and monastic commune of Mont Saint-Michel.

The speaker was occupying a terrace seating at a certain restaurant.

Named Alexandre Gascoigne, indeed he was the famous Black Prince Alec.

"What you proposed just now, could you reiterate that again, Alexandre?"

"Don't make me repeat myself so many times. I believe the legend of King Arthur is a catalyst the medieval Witch Queen, the first Guinevere, spent painstaking eons to prepare. For the sake of accomplishing some sort of colossal magic. Or perhaps it could be described as a type of magic circle."

Catalyst? The listener, Princess Alice, was intrigued.

A particular substance used to ensure the success rate when performing specific magic -- this was called a catalyst.

For example, black lotus and rose petals in powdered form are used as a catalyst to enhance [Sleep] magic.

"...Using the King Arthur legend as a catalyst? In order to accomplish some kind of magic?"

"King who manifests at the end of eras. It's definitely a spell for summoning the strongest [Steel]."

Alec said as he sliced open his baked pigeon pie. No food was placed before Alice, for she was unable to ingest anything as a spirit body.

"For the Divine Ancestors' ultimate purpose of bringing forth the 'King of the End' again, that is the pertinent spell. The ritual for summoning a [Heretic God] from the Domain of Immortality... You should already know that."

"Of course. Don't ask a stupid question of that sort."

As a side note, this type of colossal magic was accomplished two years later by Marquis Voban.

Using Wagner's *Nibelungenlied* as a catalyst, the heroic deity Siegfried was summoned. He ended up being slain by the sword of young Salvatore Doni.

"There are apparently three [Keys] to the success of this secret art. Witches and miko with outstanding powers. A priest bearing fanatical will and desire for a god's descent. And finally, to provide the summoned god with a material body, myths... the stories widely circulated amongst peoples and countries in the world."

Without myths, gods could not exist. Alice nodded as soon as she realized Alec's reasoning.

"The first and second conditions can be easily prepared by the Witch Queen herself. But the last one, that of myths, is impossible to fulfill by one person's power alone. Which is why the previous Guinevere--"

"Ah yes. That was why she devoted her efforts to expanding and promoting the Arthurian legends under her supervision."

Alec poured wine into his glass then moistened his throat with it.

"The twelfth century serves as a boundary to mark a significant change in the nature of King Arthur's legends. At that time, a local hero who only had a fanatical following in Britain was promoted in France, and from there to the rest of Europe. The troubadours received support from the Count of Anjou and the Duke of Aquitaine as well as various nobles with deep ties to the English royal family, and went to work writing stories in praise of King Arthur as if competing against one another."

"As a result, King Arthur became one of Europe's most notable heroes. Anyway, Alexandre."

Discovering what had caught Alec's attention, Alice spoke.

"What you're saying is that the previous generation's Guinevere-sama had promulgated King Arthur's legend for the purpose of summoning the 'King of the End.' All those troubadours who sang praises to the Knights of the Round Table -- had received assistance from an organization that worked behind the scenes."

There were many authors in Medieval Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who published stories about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Since many of them used pen names, their true identities and histories were mostly unknown. On the other hand, based on the content, it can be asserted that many authors were well-versed in the occult.

"The ones you found concerning, are probably the Cisternian Chrétien de Troyes, Hartmann who joined the Crusaders, as well as Wolfram von Eschenbach, Robert de Boron... These poets, right? "

Alice listed the names of many poets in detail.

"Scattered amongst their works -- especially the parts related to chivalry and the Holy Grail -- is a substantial amount of occult knowledge inherited from the Knights Templar."

"From the fact that many of these people belonged to the Knights Templar, evidence can be found that the parent organization was formed from members of the Priory of Sion and the Cisternians. Furthermore, the majority of nobles who sponsored the poets were intricately linked to knightly orders of the English royal family."

The Knights Templar. Officially known as the "Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon."

The mage organization which established the foundations of Europe's magic associations.

"The Knights Templar most likely had some sort of connection to the first Guinevere. I fear it was probably along the lines of her providing instruction about the spells and knowledge of Divine Ancestors... In actual fact, the spell words of David and the essence of smiting-level combat magic, these techniques that only paladino-ranked knights are permitted to read should have many portions influenced by witchcraft..."

Two years after his first encounter with Guinevere--

Alec and the Divine Ancestors had apparently devoted themselves like idiots to unraveling the mystery of the 'King of the End.' This probably contributed to making him so talkative on this occasion.

"Alexandre. According to the secret records of witches I investigated, the previous generation's Guinevere-sama was murdered around the end of the twelfth century during a chance encounter with a Campione."

Alec nodded proudly at the information Alice provided.

"I knew it, the same time period. But I have a different interpretation. It is likely that the previous Guinevere died before her conspiracy could bear fruit, as a result of running into obstacles during the summoning of the 'King of the End.'"

"...Can we be certain that the present Guinevere-sama intends to resume the plans of the previous generation?"

The Black Prince and White Princess had discreetly entered Brittany due to finding out that Guinevere was about to begin the ritual for summoning the "King of the End."

"Well yes, and it most likely failed already..."

"What are you talking about?"

"Rather, purely in terms of summoning Arthur, the ritual was a success. Even though she is a narrow-minded woman who overlooks everything she doesn't want to see, her abilities are special as a Divine Ancestor. Nevertheless, it's probably too late."

Alec seemed to be showing a kind of lonely expression. The answer to the mystery he had devoted so many years to pursuing, was finally in sight. Losing his all-consuming goal and passion seemed to be filling him with a sense of forlornness.

"Almost a thousand years have passed from the time the plan was put into motion. This interval is sufficient for a 'new god' to be born. Try recalling Thomas Malory's origins."

The fifteenth century English knight, Sir Thomas Malory.

This was the time period when the main role on the battlefield held by knights was being displaced by firearm-equipped infantry.

In a society where the knighted gentry was in decline and centralized royal authority was expanding, Malory was one of those fallen knights. Fallen into depravity, he escaped prison many times and was repeatedly jailed for committing various crimes such as failed assassination, rape, robbery, stealing domestic animals, etc.

But in the modern world, he would be remembered as the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a work renowned as the definitive compilation of Arthurian legends.

"Malory was not a mage. He referenced earlier existing works -- rather, he was a rascal who connected them together superficially. However, his definitive edition was indeed widely circulated amongst the people, and received independent development."

"So throughout this millennium, King Arthur became a new war god instead of the 'King of the End'?"

"Ah yes. Even writers of Templar descent added commandments and philosophies of taboo, causing the story content to surpass the intentions of the previous Guinevere, and thus the legends became bloated."

Alec seemed to be speaking in tones of regret.

"The French royal family used the legend of Charlemagne to publicize their prestige and authority. Attempting to do the same, the English royal family used the Arthurian legends thoroughly as a tool to strengthen royal authority. The end result was, embellishment of the hero King Arthur continued unabated, producing an image that deviated greatly from the original."

Charlemagne. The King of the Franks during the eighth and ninth centuries. Also known as Charles the Great.

His territory not only included modern France, but extended to Germany, Spain and Italy. The greatest conqueror in medieval Europe.

However, the great king Charlemagne was not only a ruler recorded in history, he was also served by twelve great heroes.

He was the subject of magnificent heroic legends rivaling those of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

"Myths are what forms the body and spirit of a deity. Since the myths of King Arthur the hero have been altered, the hero who descends from those myths will also change. If you look at it that way, it is only natural."

Draining his wine glass in one gulp, Alec ended the conversation.

A fortnight later, the summoning of [Heretic Arthur] proved the correctness of his hypothesis, causing the current generation's Guinevere to enter a state of partial insanity.

Godou listened to Erica and Liliana as they explained the hypothesis regarding King Arthur.

Having read the report, the knights recounted its contents to Godou on the return flight. Yes, it was the return flight leaving England and bound for Japan.

Changing their plans due to the emergency, Godou and his group decided to hurry back home. On the following day after the visit to Cornwall, they managed to obtain tickets for a flight to Haneda Airport.

"So this is the 'principle' Alice-san mentioned."

Godou nodded. As a side note, Yuri was not present.

In order to solve the mystery of Lancelot, she had stayed back with Princess Alice. It was a difficult decision taken only because neither the Black Prince nor Lancelot could be left unchecked.

"By the way, Mariya said something about Sarmatae? What is that?"

"In all the battles you have experienced so far, Godou, you've heard the name of the Scythians many times, right?"

"Sarmatae is one of the equestrian tribes under the Scythian lineages... A belligerent tribe that went into decline despite being as battle-capable as their ancestors the Scythians."

Erica and Liliana simultaneously provided explanations.

"Compared to the Scythians, the Sarmatians had the advantage of armor and spears forged from iron. They possessed the stirrups to support heavy armament, and established squadrons of heavily armed knights which surpassed the lightly equipped Scythians."

"Iron armor and spears? Somehow that doesn't feel very nomadic?"

Godou remarked at Erica's explanation.

His impressions of equestrian tribes consisted of people lightly equipped with leather protective gear and wielding bows and arrows as their primary weapons. Hence Liliana joined in:

"During the second and third centuries, their heavy armaments ushered in a new age. The other tribes that had fought against the Sarmatians -- the Goths began to use the same armaments. The Roman Empire recruited Sarmatians as mercenaries and volunteers, assigning them to various provinces across Europe. This resulted in their armaments being promoted throughout Europe..."

"Their armor and spear became the prototype for the fully armed knight. Such speculation has been proposed."

"So Lancelot is the war god of that equestrian tribe?"

Erica contemplated Godou's question for a moment before answering.

"It's possible. However, Sarmatians and Scythians are both peoples who have died out a long time ago. Even though there are small groups of people who are considered their descendants, the myths they circulate are different from their ancestors."

"So in the end, it is impossible to judge until we receive notice from Mariya Yuri and the Princess."

Liliana sighed as she spoke.

Burdened by these mysteries, Godou and his companions sank deeper into their airplane seats.

Part 2

"Traveling back and forth between Japan and England over four days and two nights, is really tiring after all..."

Godou could not help but grumble as he finally stepped out from the airport floor tiles and onto Japanese soil once more.

Even though he was young and vigorous, this was indeed a very hectic itinerary. When gods traveled to Europe, it was probably like normal everyday travel for them...?

"Sometimes I think to myself, one way to go on such trips would be to become a player on the national team representing Japan or something like that."

Or perhaps, a lightning fast trip necessitating a weekend in Europe.

No matter which, none of these were reasonable schedules. Normally, arranging trips for three to five nights would be more appropriate.

"Even though the exhaustion is quite unpleasant, the complete lack of elegance is the main problem. Traveling should be far more leisurely, an undertaking that should be comfortably enjoyed in a foreign country."

In a rare moment, the usually cool and magnificent Erica was complaining with a tone of annoyance. Next to her, Liliana also responded with extreme displeasure.

"Really... Well, if Black Prince-sama's personality is truly as rumored, then his motivations are not impossible to understand."

The group had departed on Friday night and were now arriving back in Japan on Monday afternoon, the last of their three-day weekend. This was probably akin to a military forced march.

Nevertheless, dozens of minutes later, Godou and his group were taking yet another holiday flight.

"Sorry for your troubles. But a picture is worth a thousand words. I think it's best for you to get a firsthand view of the castle of strange rock that has appeared in Tokyo Bay."

Amakasu explained in the helicopter.

Due to the noisily spinning rotors, his voice was rather difficult to hear.

Finally arriving at Haneda Airport to end their long distance journey, Godou and his group had been contacted by Amakasu. Let us survey magnificently from the air -- just as suggested, they headed off to an old staging area near the airport. It was hidden in a corner amongst many decrepit hangars whose ancient age was evident.

At a spacious vacant lot indicated by Amakasu, several helicopters were waiting on standby.

"I pulled some strings beforehand to prepare by borrowing some Japan Coast Guard helicopters. In fact, both Coast Guard and news agency helicopters are kept inside this hangar here."

And so, the helicopter took flight.

The interior of the mini-helicopter was rather cramped. However, this was Godou's first helicopter ride and his curiosity was piqued as he surveyed the inside of the cabin and peered out at the scenery outside.

Naturally, Erica, Liliana and Amakasu also came along. There were also two pilots, most likely affiliated with the Committee. They simply acknowledged Godou without saying a word and focused on operating the aircraft.

The helicopter reached the Tokyo Bay airspace soon after taking off.

"Getting too close would have troublesome consequences, but we cannot start without looking at the real thing."

"A castle of strange rock? Will it be the cause of rumors?"

An island that suddenly surfaced in Tokyo Bay. It was far too ridiculous and abnormal.

Godou's worried inquiry was met with Amakasu shaking his head.

"It's a small island, but luckily nothing of that sort has happened yet. Only those related to shipping and a couple fishermen have discovered it so far. Information control is currently under way. Oh yeah, there are Coast Guard facilities nearby, so of course they also know."

This portion of Tokyo Bay faced Tokyo, Kanagawa and Edomae of Chiba. Not only the shipping industry, but fishery also flourished in these parts.

Infamous in the past for its murky polluted waters, Tokyo Bay had benefited from multi-decade efforts in ocean purification.

Thus great results had been achieved such as vast gains in the fishery yield.

...In any case, this sea had many users so information control was very difficult.

Godou was filled with sympathy as he thought of Amakasu and his crew's labors. Well, the petrification of the Trans-Tokyo Bay Highway the previous week was probably even worse.

"Late last night, Committee-affiliated personnel sensed a great explosive increase in magical power in Tokyo Bay. They wondered if it was the appearance of a [Heretic God] -- and entered high alert . Flying on helicopters, they attempted all sorts of reconnaissance."

Godou looked down at Tokyo Bay's great expanse as he traveled in the helicopter flying in the sunny holiday sky. As long as he ignored the exhaustion from the long trip, it was actually quite a pleasant experience.

"Next, in the very center of Tokyo Bay -- in the sea right between Yokosuka and Cape Futtsu, an island that had never existed until a few hours ago was discovered."

As a side note, Yokosuka was a city situated in Kanagawa prefecture. It was also the location of the Yokosuka military port and an American military base.

On the other side, Cape Futtsu was in Chiba prefecture. Godou recalled the map of the Tokyo Bay area. Compared to the commotion centered at the artificial island of Umihotaru last time, the current position was further south and closer to the outer sea.

"Also, this is an island holding a terrifying amount of magical power. When I found out from Kusanagi-san that it was basically the doing of Prince Alec, I thought to myself, that explains everything."

"...What is that?"

Liliana narrowed her eyes as she gazed at a certain spot in the air ahead.

"Is that a cloud...? Feels very unnatural."

"What sharp vision, as expected of a witch. If all that happened was simply the surfacing of a terrifyingly shaped island, then there's no actual harm done. However, things are not so optimistic. Ah yes, it should be visible now."

Prompted by Amakasu's words, Godou began to focus his eyes as well, forward beyond the pilots.

A spiral of clouds stacked together lay ahead. It resembled the type of dark cloud cover which heralded the arrival of a thunderstorm. Shifting his gaze downwards from there, Godou figured it out.

I see, it's the castle of strange rock. An exceptionally terrifying island was floating right there.

It was covered by unevenly shaped rock. From a distance, greenery and soil were completely absent. All that could be seen were black walls of rock, rock beds and rock surfaces. It was really like a small island.

"In terms of area, ah yes... About ten hectares or so. It's probably easier to grasp if I describe it as the size of an amusement park."

As expected from the appearance, it was not very large.

The center of the small island rose up like a mountain. A mountain of black rock almost fifty or sixty meters tall. This uneven mountain was also reminiscent of an ogre's face, which must be why Amakasu called it the 'castle of strange rock.'

Furthermore, completely surrounding the island--

There were rocky reefs which would cause ships to easily run aground.

"...Could it be that no one has successfully approached the island so far? I can feel an extremely unsettling presence coming from those reefs."

"Oh, right on the money, Liliana-san."

Amakasu praised the silver-haired knight for her question.

"All the boats sent to approach the island for investigations have been wrecked. Very clearly, the reef is an impediment. When the passengers jumped into the sea with their lifejackets and began swimming furiously, somehow they all ended up far away from the island."

"So there were no casualties?"

"Fortunately none so far. Due to the quick action of the rescue boats, all personnel were successfully saved."

Godou was relieved to hear Amakasu's report.

"Not sure what kind of mechanism it is, but lingering in the immediate waters of the island results in drifting to the coast -- various places at Kanagawa and Chiba."

"Doesn't that make it something like the Devil's Sea?"[6]

"Yes, indeed. But for a Devil's Sea to appear in Tokyo Bay, it's really no joking matter."

"Perhaps, this could be the [Labyrinth]'s doing."

Listening to Godou and Amakasu, Erica spoke up.

"What's that?"

"An authority of Prince Alec's. From a report personally written by Princess Alice, it is the power usurped from Minos the god of the land and the labyrinth."

The authority to create labyrinths above and underground.

In addition, it was not limited to creation. Existing places and structures -- whether official residences, buildings, underground tunnels, forests or even mist, anything could be turned into a labyrinth in accordance with Alec's wishes, Erica explained.

"It is well within reason that the use of this authority on the sea can produce something like the Devil's Sea."

"Ah... So we really should have gone with this possibility that we had suspected. Actually, there's yet another troublesome concern."

Amakasu was muttering emphatically when Liliana suddenly cried out.

"Ex--calibur? No, Divine Sword of Salvation! The same light as the lance of Sir Lancelot!?"

"What's up, Liliana?"

Godou asked the knight who was staring in shock at the island surrounded by dark clouds and rocky reefs.

"Is it really some kind of spirit vision?"

"Y-Yes. Sir Lancelot's holy lance -- the same light could be seen being released from the island for an instant. Also, there was the name of the sword."

"Divine Sword of Salvation. The personal blade of the king who manifests at the end of eras. Sacred steel."

Liliana explained as she expelled a deep breath, followed by Erica's murmurs.

On the other hand, Amakasu seemed to be scratching his head with great worry in response to the knights' statements.

"Ah... Kaoru-san also received the same kind of oracle as Liliana-san. Then there is no doubt. Something unimaginable is lying dormant on that island."

"Is this all of that Gascoigne guy's doing? What on earth is he planning..."

"It's also related to the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. Things have really become very troublesome..."

While Godou muttered, Erica was puzzling over the situation next to him.

For Erica to show such a reaction when she had always been the one who led everyone else by the nose, the only ones Godou knew who could accomplish such a feat were Salvatore Doni and Luo Cuilian. In short, only god-slaying Campiones.

Black Prince Alec was apparently as talented as his peers in this regard.

Godou and his group discussed their concerns and views as the shaky helicopter ride continued.

The helicopter appeared to be avoiding the airspace of the " Floating Island" as much as possible, and basically circling it once.

Along the way, the wireless communications in the cabin sounded and Amakasu picked it up.

"Yes. Eh? Guinevere has been sighted at the remains of the excavation site?"

Another member of the History Compilation Committee seemed to be contacting him. As Amakasu listened intently to the detailed report, Godou steeled his determination and signaled to Erica and Liliana through his eyes. That was sufficient. The red and blue knights immediately nodded in response.

"We will make a brief visit. Perhaps some useful information can be obtained."

Godou patted the shoulder of the young man of ninja descent.

Godou was sick and tired of being played by the Black Prince. Passivity could not be allowed to continue. Action must be taken with initiative to change the situation.

Noticing Godou's resolve, Amakasu nodded in acknowledgement as he continued his communications.

Part 3

The helicopter carrying Godou and the rest was still flying in midair.

Opening the cabin at this time would be extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, such recklessness was indeed required for the sake of using Liliana's flight magic.

Violent winds suddenly swept into the cabin as the door opened!

"But Kusanagi-san, if you encounter Guinevere, Lancelot could also appear!? What are you going to do in that case!?"

"No! I don't think it's likely!"

Godou and Amakasu grabbed onto nearby objects to steady themselves as they yelled above the noise.

As if trying to stop the strong winds from overwhelming their voices.

"On what basis!?"

"Guinevere's personality!"

"Godou's right! Considering her usual caution, 'Avalon' where the King of the End sleeps must be near. I don't think she will be taking unnecessary risks!"

Erica chimed in. She was right.

Judging from the many actions the Divine Ancestor had taken in the past, it was apparent that she was an extremely cautious woman. She would not use her trump card so easily.

...Well, as for Lancelot himself, who knows? Whenever the white war god enters a frenzy, he becomes a battle maniac who even forgets whom he should be protecting... That was what Godou felt.

"Then let us depart! Hold on tight!"

Finishing the preparations for the ritual, Liliana yelled.

Godou and Erica each placed a hand on the blue knight's shoulder. Immediately, blue light burst forth and they took flight. The destination was the beach at Kisarazu--

The place where the Heavenly Reverse Halberd had been excavated last week.

A lone red torii stood on the empty field which still showed clear signs of excavation by heavy machinery. Rather than this spot, Guinevere was standing closer to the beach, across the windbreak plantation.

Over there. She was motionlessly gazing at the sea.

Her blonde hair wavered gently in the breeze. Her wondrous girlish eyes shimmered with brilliance. Also, that exquisitely beautiful face like an antique doll's -- Divine Ancestor Guinevere indeed.

Held in her hands was a bronze-colored disc.

Perhaps some kind of alloy, for it appeared to be colored like a mixture of iron and gold. Guinevere embraced it with tender affection.

As if it were the relic of someone she held dear--

"Salutations. Would you be offended by this manner of greeting , Kusanagi-sama?"

She must have noticed. Guinevere immediately turned around.

Greeting with a curtsy as she held the hem of her black formal dress. All of a sudden, the disc disappeared from her hands.

"I'm in a particularly bad mood, so quit it with the formalities."

Godou responded coldly, the two knights standing on his left and right.

Erica and Liliana were each clad in their respective capes of red and blue, readying themselves for battle.

"Then let me offer my utmost apologies. The act of borrowing Your Highness' power a few days ago was truly impertinent."

"Let that be. In the end, I also made use of your power."

Godou replied indifferently to Guinevere's apology.

"On the other hand, interference in my conflict with Athena cannot possibly be forgiven. I believe the debt you owe will be repaid one day."

Godou was speaking in a cold tone of voice that even surprised himself.

There was no anger at Guinevere and Lancelot for interfering in his duel with his enemy. Neither was there any hatred. All that was present was the conviction of "an eye for an eye."

"I believe that day draws near. You should better prepare yourself."

"Yes, certainly. Guinevere and Sir Knight are both keenly aware that the next encounter with Your Highness is inevitable. By the way, Kusanagi-sama, for the sake of caution, would you mind listening to Guinevere's question?"

"What?"

"Are you the one who raised the island where both the king who manifests at the end of eras and the Divine Blade of Salvation sleep -- Avalon?"

Avalon. A location repeatedly mentioned recently.

The island of the fairies where England's hero King Arthur sleeps. As the legends go, after fighting his nephew Mordred, he waited for his revival while his wounds were being healed on this island...

"No, it wasn't me. It seems to be that guy, your old pal."

"As expected... Guinevere also thought the same. It is most likely an invitation Alexandre-sama sent out for Guinevere."

A shadow of worry entered Guinevere's eyes as she gazed at the vast open sea.

"That person continues to harass without end! For him to have discovered before Guinevere the land of hopes that she seeks, and locking it away with his labyrinth authority, how truly contemptible...!"

A statement of hatred. Godou was stunned for a moment.

This emotional outburst was completely different from what he had witnessed from Guinevere all along. With only a superficial smile remaining, that wondrous lady-like demeanor was gone, and the intense emotions hidden in her heart revealed themselves.

To think this witch also had a side like this -- how unexpected.

"By the way, didn't you mention the Divine Sword of Salvation just now? Isn't that the spear Lancelot was wielding last time?"

"No, it is the relic belonging to the King of the End."

Guinevere replied indifferently to Godou's change of subject.

"Our master is the strongest immortal hero. Nevertheless, after vanquishing all the god-slayers, he enters a dormant state akin to temporary death. While he restores himself from the state of exhaustion, he readies himself for his next coming -- when multiple Devil King Campiones roam free, threatening the world."

In other words, lying in a state of suspended animation, waiting for Campiones to be born?

The strongest [Steel]. Godou nodded, finally learning the true state of the sleeping one.

"When Master enters sleep, his body dissociates and assimilates itself with the earth in order to accumulate its essence. When that happens, his remains appear in the form of a divine sword, marking the land like a tombstone."

"Remains appearing in the form of a divine sword..."

"Human magi seem to be calling them names with the likes of dragon bones, angel's remains, sacred relics. Guinevere had polished those remains once more to become Sir Knight's lance. Nevertheless, it is merely a fake. Only the one wielded by its owner the 'King of the End' can truly be the Divine Sword of Salvation."

The Witch Queen once again stared out at sea, towards where the treasure she desired lay.

"Guinevere and other Divine Ancestors are the miko who served the 'King of the End.' When Master arrives again, all of us shall hurry forth to serve under his command. However, so many god-slayers have already been born in the past millennium. Even so, Master still has not descended upon us once more."

Guinevere lamented her situation poignantly.

"We Divine Ancestors seek our sleeping Master, hoping Master will descend again. In our long and arduous search, many remains in the form of divine swords have been discovered. However, none of these locations held the sleeping Master--"

I see. Godou figured it out.

When multiple Campiones appeared on earth, the 'King of the End' apparently revived. And then he would start the war of annihilation to sweep the world clean of god-slayers. Even though it was unknown how many millennia ago it began, this cycle of dormancy and rebirth seemed to have already repeated many times.

As a result, even if the divine sword remains were found, it did not mean he was present...

"I have also tried summoning Master by magic, through promoting myths involving one of Master's sacred names, 'Arthur.' However, it failed. Or perhaps, considering there are other myths circulating under Master's alternate names, I have also searched for legends of [Steel] in both oriental and occidental lands."

The witch and Divine Ancestor, neither immortal nor indestructible.

In order to find the strongest [Steel], she resorted to reincarnation despite being murdered before her wish was fulfilled , thereby continuing her search.

As if bound by a curse. In a certain sense, it was a pitiful existence. Hearing Guinevere's mutterings, Godou found himself slightly pitying those Divine Ancestors.

"Then the long search finally came to fruition, by tracking down this land's legend of the 'Noble One who sleeps with the sword.' Furthermore, the divine sword's aura now emanates from that island."

Godou immediately tensed as soon as Guinevere's gaze brightened.

Both she and her protector were Godou's "enemies."

"In the surroundings of where that one sleeps, legends of 'a hero who shall revive together with a divine sword' will always surface. Due to the divine splendor of the strongest [Steel], the legends have taken root deep in the hearts of humanity. The legend of Avalon that once existed in Britain has made its reappearance."

Godou recalled the legend he recently heard from Kaoru.

Queen Oto Tachibana-Hime, jumped into the sea with sword embosomed. Sea currents carried her sword to a location of neither land nor sea, whence a floating island subsequently appeared. That was indeed the island where the "King of the End" slept.

Asserting thus, Guinevere turned to face Godou.

"By the way, Kusanagi-sama, we have no objection to our inevitable battle against Your Highness. However, there is the saying, the enemy of an enemy is a friend. When a common enemy appears, it is not a bad idea to put our grudges aside to cooperate."

"I don't think enemies can be determined that easily."

"No. The way Guinevere sees it, Kusanagi-sama and the Black Prince are definitely incompatible. Once you have determined the Prince to be a hindrance, please do let me know."

Hmm. Godou frowned. That was a separate matter anyway.

This Guinevere is trying to borrow my power again? By the time he noticed, Guinevere was already drawing near. The previous week's memories reawakened.

Another kiss? Godou stayed on high alert.

"Guinevere-sama, please step back."

"Ah yes. Approach any further and you will regret the consequences."

Erica stepped forward as Liliana followed suit, grumbling.

The two extended their hands in a stance ready to summon their magic swords.

"Hohoho. How prepared. I would be most pleased if Your Highness would give my words some consideration. Nevertheless, Guinevere has no reasons of refutation. I shall take my leave for now!"

Surrounded by light, she took flight. Steadily accelerating upwards, she disappeared into the ends of the sky.

"Huh, so Guinevere-san said that."

Amakasu arrived with the helicopter's landing on the beach.

Hearing Godou's explanation, he remarked emphatically.

"So that castle of strange rock is Avalon, eh? This is something that can't be ignored. As a Japanese, it would be more appropriate to call an island that surfaces in the Bousou Sea the Floating Island."

"Hey Amakasu-san, so the object Prince Alec stole was the Heavenly Reverse Halberd."

Erica began to talk to the History Compilation Committee member.

"Isn't that the same name as the tool used by the gods to create the islands of Japan?"

"Yes. Actually, the myth of the two gods Izanagi and Izanami's founding of the country seems to be an ancient legend originating from the seafaring tribes of southern Chuugoku[7] region."

"Prince Alec used the land-creating divine artifact to raise up that island...? This is the most simple and direct explanation one can deduce..."

Seeing Erica and Liliana deep in thought, Amakasu relaxed his shoulders.

"Everyone, let's go home for today. It's really been a long and arduous journey. You should all get some rest in preparation for what is to come."

And so, Amakasu gave Godou and the rest a lift back to Tokyo's Bunkyou ward. Still, Godou remained worried about Yuri and Alice who continued with investigations in Europe--

Amakasu stopped before the shopping street of Sanchoume at Nezu.

Home sweet home. Due to the brief but eventful journey, Godou felt like he had been away from home for ten days. Watching Amakasu's car leave, Godou suddenly noticed.

His childhood friend Asuka was standing at the entrance to the commercial street.

"What are you doing? Waiting for someone?"

"Uh yes, pretty much. Godou, you just came back eh?"

Before he knew it, the sun had already set and it was night.

It was already the time when visitors to the commercial street had thinned out. At a time like this, Asuka was standing before the entrance to the commercial street, looking like she was waiting for someone.

"Ah yes. Even though it got a bit messy, I was able to return home at least."

"It has been quite a while, Tokunaga Asuka."

Standing by Godou's side, Liliana also tried to make conversation with his childhood friend. However, Asuka simply answered vaguely with "Umm, yes, it's been a while."

For some reason, her usual domineering glare had vanished today, showing only meekness.

Her gaze was focused towards Erica Blandelli. A strikingly beautiful girl whose natural beauty was further enhanced by splendorous presence and talent. With those well-trained manners from a Milanese education, it was only natural for her to become the focus of any situation.

"By the way, I guess it's the first time for you two to meet. Asuka, this is Mariya and Liliana's friend, Erica. And Erica, this is my longtime friend Asuka. You've never met before, right?"

"Right. Though I've heard her name before."

Erica nodded in response to Godou's introductions.

Walking immediately up to Asuka, Erica bore a smile that could only be described as synonymous to elegance itself.

"A pleasure to meet you. My name is Erica Blandelli. As you can hear, my Japanese is perfect so you don't have to worry. Also, perhaps you may know already, but Godou and I share an extremely intimate relationship. I hope you don't mind."

"Extremely intimate -- ah, I've heard rumors at least."

For some reason, Asuka's face began twitching for an instant after hearing Erica's cheerful self-introduction.

"Is that so? Then there's no need to spell out the details."

On the other hand, Erica was bearing a blooming smile like a flourishing Japanese camellia flower.

A gorgeous smile. It was a radiant smile from the heart without any reservations.

"In actual fact, I had wanted to visit all of Godou's longtime friends. Letting them all know the name of Erica Blandelli should prove to be convenient for various things in the future."

"Hey you, plotting that kind of thing after all."

"Oh my, plotting is such an unexpected description. It'd be nice if the ones close to you can become our mutual friends, wouldn't you agree?"

This was a mode of thinking that Liliana, Yuri, and definitely Ena would not even consider.

However, Erica explained it as if it was the most natural thing in the world. The goal of expanding social circles required a habit of conscious cultivation of friendships. Possessing the quality of becoming the center of attention and popularity in no matter what kind of organization, that was Erica's true nature.

"However, even without that sort of intentions, I feel like I can become great friends with Asuka-san. I shall be in your care. Most likely, we will be running into each other frequently from now on."

In addition, Erica did not neglect to smile at the hesitating Asuka. Entering a carefree dialogue to help reduce the sense of distance, she was socially skilled indeed.

Well, that said, Erica was still a person who often acted recklessly as she pleased...

"Umm, yes. I'll be in your care."

"What is the matter, Tokunaga Asuka? You do not seem very well?"

The extremely domineering childhood friend whose scoldings were as common as greetings. Such was Asuka's original personality, but somehow she had become so meek in front of Erica she was like a different person.

Feeling puzzled, Liliana questioned with a surprised expression .

"N-No, I'm fine, don't worry! It's just something that makes me slightly concerned!"

"Something makes you concerned? If you don't mind, you can talk it out with me."

"It's my own problem, so mind your own business! Anyway, you have to put some thought into Shizuka-chan's present! There's not much time left!"

As soon as she switched to speaking with Godou, Asuka's state seemed to recover instantly.

What on earth was going on? It felt like the childhood friend was watching Erica as if she was some kind of exceptionally bright object.

"So, we'll be going. Are you waiting for someone?"

Recalling the first thing she had said, Godou asked.

Unexpectedly, Asuka shook her head.

"It's done. And just so you know, I was waiting for you."

"Eh, me? Why?"

"Someone who knows you is waiting at our shop. I used to think the only foreigners you knew were Erica-san and Liliana-san, but never expected such a handsome foreign gentleman to be your friend."

"...That guy, could he be blonde?"

The shop mentioned by Asuka was the family business passed down for generations, the sushi shop "Sushi-Toku."

Someone considered a handsome foreigner. Godou immediately recalled the retarded Italian. Did that guy finally come around to my neighborhood? However...

"No, he's tall and black-haired. Half an hour ago, he was standing here, drinking canned coffee. Seeing as he was a foreign stranger, I went up and asked if he was lost."

She probably started a conversation with a clumsy mixture of English and Japanese.

An ordinary girl would never act in such a friendly manner but Asuka always seemed so fearless. Precisely because of that, Godou felt it was rather jarring that she displayed such apprehension only in front of Erica.

"His Japanese was very fluent. 'I am waiting for the man called Kusanagi Godou' was what he said. So I told him it was someone I knew but had gone traveling abroad. Then he asserted 'He'll be back immediately, I'm absolutely certain' just like that."

And so Asuka had advised him "In that case, why don't you wait in our shop?"

Hearing this exchange, Godou immediately signaled to his two companions with his eyes.

"Could it be possible, even that person has...!?" Liliana's eyes seemed to be saying.

"Even though unexpected, it is very possible--" said Erica with her eyes.

Godou immediately broke into a run.

Running straight to the sushi shop he had known since childhood.

Crack! The slide door flew open with great momentum. On this Sunday night, within "Sushi-Toku" that was bustling with customers, a black-haired young man with eyes of black was sitting next to the cashier. A handsome man with a pale white complexion, tall physique, and wearing a stylish black jacket.

He was drinking sake from a cup as he dined on a sashimi platter to go with the alcohol.

His sharp gaze turned towards the entrance. As their eyes met, Godou and the man glared at each other head on.

As this was not an encounter with a god, there was no sense of overflowing battle spirit or power. However, Godou was certain beyond doubt. This guy was Alexandre Gascoigne, the English Campione who had been playing Godou for a fool.

Part 4

"The one I'm waiting for finally arrived. Later than expected."

Alec grumbled as he laid down several 10000 yen notes at the cashier.

He immediately stood up without waiting for the change.

"Thank you for the hospitality. Should there be another opportunity, I shall enjoy a longer stay. Ah yes, sorry for all the trouble."

Alec had just reached the entrance to the shop.

At that very moment, Asuka arrived from behind Godou, panting nonstop. She looked like she had been chasing after the childhood friend who suddenly ran here.

"...You two are friends, right?"

Asking with a bit of worry, she seemed to have sensed the tense atmosphere between Godou and Alec.

"Rather than friends, more like acquaintances... No, a bit different from that."

"Ah yes. Kin, two of a kind, birds of a feather. Such descriptions should be appropriate."

Godou and Alec simply gave Asuka a quick glance.

Neither of them shifted their gaze away from the other Campione. Or more accurately, they could not shift their gazes.

Based on the fact that neither of them was supposed to be the type of person who rampaged recklessly, they should be dealing with each other in a more calm and composed manner. Nevertheless, Godou did not take his eyes off Alec and neither did Alec shift his gaze from Godou.

"Go for a quick walk?"

"Sure."

Godou responded curtly to Alec's suggestion and the two exited the sushi shop.

Continuing to stare at each other was not a solution. Godou deliberately walked beside Alec, as if trying to avoid seeing his face. The other guy seemed to be thinking the same thing.

Godou and Alec walked side by side without saying anything.

This probably made them look like a pair of friends. Realizing that, Godou instantly felt displeased. Alec was definitely feeling the same thing.

Erica and Liliana had been waiting outside the shop.

Godou motioned with his eyes and the knights followed silently.

"Looks like you can't even take a walk without female company."

"Better than someone who doesn't even tell his subordinates and companions where he's going."

Standing shoulder to shoulder like friends, but bickering with vitriol.

Why? Godou began to feel anxious. This was his first time -- no, this was the same sense of anxiety he felt when he met Salvatore Doni.

A completely unfounded sense of competitiveness against the man before him. A rising sense of hostility had been aroused.

"I already advised you not to return for now, and yet you deliberately came running back..."

Alec entered the main topic without even bothering to introduce himself.

Godou did not mind. As humans, an appropriate level of manners was desirable, but for us two right now, it was unnecessary.

"Could you do as the letter suggested?"

Leaving the commercial street at Nezu Sanchoume, the two of them walked into the area of Nezu Shrine.

Luckily there were no other people around. Godou replied without holding back.

"Looking at it the other way, anyone would consider that a challenge."

"Useless and redundant competitive spirit. For me to revive ' Avalon' and cause this incident at this time, you should have understood my goals and intentions."

As if anyone would understand! Godou was amazed as Alec continued to harangue.

"Why not stand back and watch? You should wait until things have settled before venturing out. If I were in your shoes, that's what I'd do without any hesitation. It would be the most relaxing and efficient way. And you don't waste unnecessary power."

"As if anyone would do that! On the contrary, they'd come back to check out the situation instead, right?"

"Hmph, you really are a Campione. A savage who acts on impulse instead of reason. What good are you if you can't even do something as simple as sitting back and solving a locked room mystery?"[8]

"Completely unnecessary. Instead of guessing randomly about the identity of the murderer, just do things properly by looking for clues at the scene!"

It was turning into a childish argument. Even though the witch had seemed like a sheltered lady oblivious to the real world, her assessment of character was perhaps rather accurate.

Kusanagi Godou and Black Prince Alec, were indeed rather incompatible...

"By the way, aren't you the one who stole the artifact we unearthed? Shouldn't a thief get off his high horse?"

"Only borrowing. I already wrote clearly on the letter I'd return it as soon as things are settled."

"I've heard that you have borrowed many times without returning. Tsk, you really are the worst amongst Campiones. What a weirdo who never considers the trouble you bring to others."

"You're in no place to say such words. You savage who causes destruction everywhere you go. With the things you do all over the world, you are just a terrorist no matter how conservatively you estimate the damage. How carefree of you to ignore your own issues."

As they argued against each other, Godou's lips were distorted by rage while Alec's face was filled with fury.

What was this feeling? Both knew so much about each other's weaknesses and the ugly truths they did not wish to face.

"Basically, I still don't understand what goal you're talking about. What are you planning by making that island in Tokyo Bay ?"

Godou abruptly changed the subject.

"If you don't understand, then enjoy the show until the matter is over. Anyway, I've already used my authority to turn that island into a labyrinth. Approach at your own risk."

"Alexandre-sama, may I ask a question?"

Walking with Liliana behind them, Erica suddenly spoke up.

"Call me Alec instead. Whether writing or pronouncing, that name is such a pain."

"Then Alec, may I confirm a fact. The so-called king who manifests at the end of eras, is the god who descends for the purpose of exterminating the Devil Kings when a number of Campiones appear on earth...?"

"Indeed. The god for exterminating all the Devil Kings... Though I still have a few doubts in this regard."

Apparently, his enmity towards Kusanagi Godou did not extend to the knights.

"After seeing that Great Sage Equaling Heaven who appeared several months ago, my opinion changed. For that monkey to be so powerful, it seems to be the same power used by the 'King of the End' as part of his Devil King-exterminating authority."

"Furthermore, the 'King of the End' disappears from earth as soon as all god-slayers are eliminated, entering deep slumber until the time when multiple Campiones appear again--"

"An acceptable description. However, seven Devil Kings have already appeared and yet he remains asleep."

Black Prince Alec replied rather cautiously.

Godou was somewhat surprised. Despite his arrogant personality, this man did not mind instructing others. In actual fact , he was probably someone who was good at looking after people.

"What I suspect is, a few centuries after the 'King of the End' battled in England, he descended somewhere in Asia. At that time, he also exterminated the god-slayers and went to sleep. That somewhere in Asia is indeed Japan, in the region of Tokyo Bay."

After questioning, Erica suddenly proposed her speculation. Alec simply answered "Oh" in acknowledgement.

"The little island that surfaced in Tokyo Bay must be where he sleeps. But as luck would have it, Japan has its elders -- the group of guardians centered around the heroic deity Susanoo. Seeing the 'King of the End' as a threat, they sank the 'island' into the sea using some kind of wizardry. The key to this wizardry is the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. Thereafter, Alec discovered how to use this halberd and made the island surface again. Is that correct?"

The Heavenly Reverse Halberd. The same name as the divine artifact used to create the islands of Japan.

So in the past, Susanoo and his group did not create an "island," but sank it into the sea instead?

It was an imaginative but reasonable hypothesis. Erica's speculation seemed bold but the logic was sound. How would the Black Prince react?

"...That's rather sharp of you. Though it's not exactly correct, you've managed to outline a rough picture of the truth."

Alec looked at her as if impressed by an excellent student.

"Let me tell you a hint, that of the name of the so-called 'Leech Child.' The rest is left as an exercise for you people. For Guinevere, that island is a final destination she cannot disregard. However, I have prepared a trap there to send that witch to her grave."

"...You're planning on taking out Guinevere?"

Alec immediately nodded at Godou's question.

"That woman owes me. The likes of making counterfeits of the Holy Grail has incurred multiple debts. It's about time to make her pay. Though she's cautious and good at running away, with Avalon prepared, she will surely fall into the trap."

Alec's facial profile displayed unshakable willpower as he spoke.

This man was a god-slayer after all. Even if he had a few idiosyncrasies, he was still a natural born god-slaying warrior. That type of ferocity of his was now clearly displayed.

"I see... However, Lancelot who guards Guinevere is my enemy. "

If Alec wants to defeat her, just leave it all to him. As a pacifist, unnecessary battles should be avoided as much as possible. Even though the idea clearly crossed his mind, Godou did not give voice to it.

"I can't let you have them. Besides, you don't lose anything by retreating now."

"I could say the same to you. After all, Lancelot is just an enemy you fought once, right? Stop acting like you own the place."

Glaring at each other, both refused to back down.

Emotions of hostility and resistance were starting to get fired up . Unbelievable. Was it because these two Campiones were rather close in age? Or was contention over the Heavenly Reverse Halberd the root cause?

Godou and Alec could feel ferocious battle spirit from each other that had been absent when they first met just now.

"May I offer a suggestion to you two?"

Liliana suddenly spoke.

She had been watching the situation silently until now, so why was she entering the fray? Godou nodded in puzzlement as Alec answered "Sure."

"Alexandre-sama, or rather, Alec's target is Guinevere. Then there is Kusanagi Godou's wish to fight Sir Lancelot. In that case, since both sides wish to fight against their respective opponents, it would seem appropriate to form an alliance."

"...Oh?" "...Hmm."

That's right, this should have been the first topic of discussion from the very start.

The two pondered for a moment, but quickly reached a conclusion.

" "Impossible!" "

Without any coordination beforehand, Godou and Alec gave the same answer simultaneously. Going "tsk" and smacking their lips at the same time, they looked away and turned their backs on Erica and Liliana.

(Hey, are those two not a perfect match for each other after all?)

(That's so true. Even though their personalities are clearly incompatible and their rhythm is supposed to be off, right?)

(Their personalities are supposed to be completely different, but there seem to be subtle similarities in certain areas.)

(Whether Godou or the Black Prince, both are incredibly vain. They both insist "I am different from other Campiones.")

(I see. It is akin to looking at a distorting mirror and seeing a distasteful reflection of oneself.)

(They must be aware that even though the other person's character was opposite to themselves, similarities exist. Hence the resulting intensity of revulsion. Most likely, that kind of feeling is like listening to your own recorded voice.)

Erica and Liliana could be heard whispering behind his back.

Godou secretly cursed them a thousand times for their gossiping ways. Alec also frowned, most likely feeling the same thing. The two Devil Kings pretentiously faced each other once again.

"I have said everything I wish to inform you about, Kusanagi Godou. If you still want to interfere, prepare yourself for the consequences."

Alec declared, speaking the name of Kusanagi Godou for the first time.

"You're the one who should be careful, Gascoigne. If you do anything to harm where I live, I will not remain silent."

Godou responded with a tone of warning that he seldom employed.

The two knights watched as the Black Prince sneered and left. Whether the Devil King of Swords, the old Marquis of Eastern Europe, the sworn elder sister who commanded the Chinese martial realm, the hero of North America, any of these so-called peers who had recently appeared one after another, none of them seemed possible to establish friendly relations with.

Part 5

While Kusanagi Godou and the Campione of divine speed were having their verbal dispute...

The war god in white armor was silently staring up at the moon .

Lancelot du Lac. The one known as the Knight of the Lake. Wielder of the divine lance Excalibur and protector of Witch Queen Guinevere.

Protected from head to foot by white armor. Helmet, breastplate , gauntlets, greaves -- Nowhere was any skin exposed.

He was at a beach, basking in the moonlight.

Having gazed at the distant full moon, he turned towards the ocean before him. Avalon was floating straight ahead. This was the island where his master, the hero once known as "Artos" in the land of Britain, lay sleeping.

The enemy Alexandre Gascoigne had made this island surface. Surely it was to summon Guinevere as well as her protector Lancelot.

Furthermore, Kusanagi Godou, who had promised a second battle, had apparently returned as well.

--Alas! Lancelot lamented.

The day of battle was drawing near, but he had yet to fully revive. This must have been due to the recent battle against Athena and Kusanagi Godou which had delayed the recovery of divine power.

Fighting in the current state will result in premature depletion of power again.

He had never liked prolonged battles or wars of attrition. It was Lancelot's true style to gallop at maximum speed for a full-powered attack, sweeping all his enemies away.

But in his current state, a single charge would deplete his strength.

For the sake of battling without reservation, he had to prepare well for the second and third charges. Time was needed. Time for retrieving divine power.

--No. Lancelot realized that was surely not the case.

"This Knight's wish is to reach a conclusion with that youth without being burdened by any restrictions..."

Discerning his true wish with clarity, he gained a new sense of self understanding.

Not even a fortnight had passed since the previous battle. Kusanagi Godou -- the details of the intense battle with the young god-slayer were still vivid in memory.

"Kusanagi Godou... The name of the foe this Knight shall vanquish. Hohoho, what a sound to be cherished."

He savored the name as it rolled off the tongue like fine wine.

The youth who had been bound to Athena by unfavorable fate. Recalling that face, calling out that name, Lancelot could feel his heart stir with excitement as he recalled the youth's strength and bravery.

Blood was boiling. The soul was shaking.

"One desires power. One desires time for the sake of healing this wound-riddled body. One desires the blade for meeting that youth in battle, clashing together, slicing each other, exchanging blows."

In actual fact, this wish was already within reach. A complete makeover. Very likely, it would fully manifest the divinity of the heretical war god who would abandon the girl under his protection.

However, it came at the cost of changing oneself.

--Alas! What sweet temptation!

Just as Lancelot sighed silently as he contemplated under the clear bright moon...

"Sir Knight. So you are here."

A voice from behind. Guinevere had arrived.

"Ah yes. What is the situation?"

Lancelot turned around and answered in a carefree tone of voice.

He should not burden this girl with unnecessary worries.

"Most regrettably, failure. As expected, it is impossible to land on Avalon without breaking through Prince Alec's labyrinth... Other than that particular method."

"The method of manifesting Minos the god of the land and the labyrinth?"

Guinevere recounted with a worried expression while Lancelot muttered in response.

Alec's labyrinth authority had been usurped from the Cretan bull-headed god Minos. In the past, Guinevere had emulated a portion of Minos' divinity and manifested it. This was achieved using the spirit power of [Divine Summoning] that only Divine Ancestors could use.

As long as the divinity of Minos as the god of the labyrinth was emulated, it should be possible to break through Alec's labyrinth.

"However, creating fake gods requires the Holy Grail's magical power. Not only that, a huge amount is needed. Fortunately, the magical power absorbed from Athena has provided ample stores."

"Using the Holy Grail to summon a fake god would be deviating from its intended usage."

Storing and supplying the essence of the earth was the Holy Grail's original function.

"Gascoigne also knows this. Beloved child, he is trying to bait you into doing so. Forcing you to manifest fake Minos, and then drawing you into Avalon."

Guinevere was in possession of three trump cards.

Lancelot, the Holy Grail, and the divine lance Excalibur.

If the Grail was used to summon a fake god, it would become unusable for a certain reason. Not only that, the divine lance also depended on the Grail for supplying magical power. This meant losing two trump cards.

"Yes, indeed that is true. Nevertheless, Guinevere is still obliged to go!"

Tears flooded Guinevere's eyes as she was overcome with anger and humiliation. Her tearful gaze was pointed towards the other side of the sea.

"It cannot be helped. Unless fake Minos is used to destroy the maze, Avalon cannot be entered. Before that, this Knight shall spare no effort."

Identifying clearly what he must do, Lancelot declared with bold magnificence.

Yes. The recovery of divine power was only secondary. It was enough to use all strength from this inadequate body and fulfill the duties of a knight. All redundant emotions must be abandoned .

However--

"If only Kusanagi-sama could be won over to fight against Prince Alec then things would be a lot easier. If that could be done, then Guinevere and you can focus completely on breaking into Avalon."

But Guinevere said it.

The name of the enemy whose mention boiled the war god's blood. That scene too!

"Not too long ago, Guinevere had used Kusanagi-sama for the sake of conspiring against Athena. Getting him to fall for another trick would be unlikely. It would probably be better to consider some other method."

"No... As expected, how about that method?"

The white war god uttered it. The sentence that was about to unlock the gates of taboo.

"Did you forget? This Knight happens to be the god whose very existence is founded upon madness and passion. This god of madness shall let both this Knight and that youth's blood boil with passion."

"--Sir Knight?"

"Hohoho, this is the plan. Kusanagi Godou shall first be won over, and after he assists in vanquishing Gascoigne, this Knight shall have a duel with him. By this Knight's divine might, it shall be done!"

"But Sir Knight, achieving this plan means you need to get close to Kusanagi-sama."

Guinevere warned Lancelot in a soft and worried voice.

"What now, there exists a spell for this purpose. Even though one stands as a knight, one's true nature is a barbarian with neither aspirations nor philosophy, a ferocious soldier unfettered by morals or reason. Acts of insanity beyond the ability of typical gods, only this Knight shall accomplish..."

Quietly muttering, the white war god commanded the beloved child.

"This has not been done for eons. Beloved child, assist this Knight!"

Just as the Witch Queen and the war god headed towards the Bousou Sea again, the god-slayers were restlessly biding their time .

On the island known as Avalon as well as the Floating Island, surrounding the Divine Sword of Salvation, the battle stage was about to be unveiled.

Chapter 4 - The Fall of Godou

Part 1

Ever since the strange "island" appeared in the sea of Edomae--

The panic surrounding Kusanagi Godou had settled into a kind of stable state instead.

Black Prince Alec was reportedly laying low in the Yokohama Chinatown. However, Amakasu's face looked rather awkward as soon as he received the report.

"That place, it does presents some difficulties. It is the location where gangs of Chinese descent -- many secret associations or the like are hidden... In our field, it's known as a concession territory of lawlessness. Any Committee member foolish enough to step foot there would be a painted target, thrown into Tokyo Bay with their feet encased in cement on occasion."

"What if I go there directly...?"

"Of course it's fine for Kusanagi-san. Everyone will simply raise up their hands, either to welcome or to surrender. But if two great Devil Kings already embroiled in conflict were to have a close encounter in the center of metropolitan Yokohama, I don't think anything pretty will come out of it..."

It seemed to be a subtle situation.

Undoubtedly, Alec chose the place for the purpose of keeping the "island" in Tokyo Bay under surveillance.

Furthermore, Guinevere and Lancelot still had to be located. Regardless, they were a partnership between a god and a Divine Ancestor, and due to Alec they had become even more elusive. Without any way of finding them other than through wizardry or spirit power investigation, it was not exactly a favorable situation.

As a result, Godou could do nothing but "bide his time for the right moment."

A few days after the long weekend, all he could do was wait. Waiting for Mariya Yuri to return.

It was a Friday in the latter half of November.

After school, Godou was hurrying to Toranomon via the subway.

Last night, having reached Nanao Shrine where she was stationed as a Hime-Miko, Yuri had called to inform him of her return. In order to recover the fatigue of overusing spirit vision throughout her journey, she told him she was going to apply for a week's leave from school.

"In terms of results, I was not able to discern Sir Lancelot's divinity completely."

Those were Yuri's first words after meeting Godou.

They were sitting face to face in a room of a certain administrative building within Nanao Shrine.

"Ah yes. You mentioned on the phone yesterday."

Godou nodded. Even with potent spirit vision, the mystery was still unsolved.

He would be lying if he denied disappointment, but Godou was happy and grateful for the miko and the Princess' investigations.

Not able to discern completely. Conversely, it implied spirit vision had discerned something to a certain extent.

"What did you find out?"

"After you left, the Princess and I went to Brittany, to visit the various places the previous and current generations of Guinevere-sama had used as their stronghold such as forests, towns, cities or former monasteries."

"...Monasteries. Isn't that the place the group of people who compiled King Arthur's legends used as their base of operations..."

Forests, towns, and cities aside, monasteries was a term that felt oddly out of place. However, Godou already knew the reason -- the medieval conspiracy that Alexandre Gascoigne had elucidated.

"Then we went to Bulgaria."

"Bulgaria? Why?"

That meant traveling from northwestern France to this Eastern European country. Since both places were on the same landmass, getting there probably did not present too much difficulty.

But why go there? Godou was puzzled.

"Not too long ago, Sir Lancelot had apparently descended upon the Thracian plains. The Princess and I went there together to take a tour of the crater carved out by Sir Lancelot's authority."

Recalling war god Lancelot's galloping charge, Godou nodded.

A direct collision could definitely create a crater or two.

"Why would he need to dig such a big hole in place like that?"

"According to history, ancient Thrace was within the Scythian and Sarmatian spheres of influence. Perhaps for that reason, it became associated with Lancelot."

Yuri was dressed in a traditional miko outfit with a white upper garment and a red hakama as she explained about the foreign deity.

"Fortunately, I received a few hints. First of all, Sir Lancelot is the war god worshiped by the Sarmatians. Next, Guinevere-sama's precursor was a mother earth goddess who had been worshiped together with Sir Lancelot..."

"Deities who were originally closely related, and still working together in modern times, eh?"

"Should be something like that. Those two most likely descended to earth as [Heretic Gods], encountered each other and started acting in unison. Then I used spirit vision to see the arrival of the 'King of the End,' and saw those two joining under his command. However..."

Yuri paused slightly at this point.

"Even so, I was unable to see Lancelot's face. He was always clad in armor."

"He always wears stuff like armor?"

"Yes. I have basically seen what attributes he possesses as a god, but I cannot do anything about what lies beneath the armor. On the other hand, without knowing what is underneath, I fear it will be impossible to understand his true..."

Yuri sighed mournfully as she explained.

"At least, no matter how slight, I wish I could catch a glimpse of his divine appearance exposed from the armor."

Lancelot was protected from head to toe by full plate armor. Godou felt that trying to take it off would take bone-breaking effort.

But there was no other choice. Godou nodded and bowed, answering:

"I got it, Mariya. Thank you very much. Learning all this is good enough. Next time I see that guy, I'll try to find a way to strip him of that white suit of armor."

Hearing that, the Hime-Miko chuckled and smiled like a delicate and blooming cherry blossom.

"There is no need to thank me. I did it for Godou-san... only for you."

Godou was filled with the desire to embrace this beautiful and adorable Hime-Miko.

Due to the overabundance of attractive beauties around him, Godou deliberately maintained a mentality of repressed desire. Always warning himself never to harbor indecent thoughts against them.

But on occasion, Yuri was able to crush this determination of Godou's.

The Yamato Nadeshiko and young beauty displayed great gentleness under most conditions, but was extremely stern every now and then. Without provoking Godou's wariness, she had been slowly and steadily bringing their relationship closer.

Using the analogy of a garden of flowers, Erica would be a gorgeous and blooming camellia, overshadowing others to take center stage.

Liliana would be a pristine white lily with large petals.

Ena would probably be a wild orchid with bright and vivid colors.

Compared to other girls, Yuri was definitely not a flower that seized people's attentions. Though there was no difference in her level of beauty, she never emphasized her attractiveness and the wish to compete never occurred to her.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of that, it made her even more charming.

Realizing this once again, Godou began to blush.

"What is the matter, Godou-san?"

On the other hand, Yuri was bearing a delicate and beautiful smile, unaware of Godou's thoughts.

"No, n-nothing really."

"Good... Anyway, I have one more matter I wish to discuss, may I?"

Yuri suddenly changed the subject. Of course there was no reason to refuse. Godou immediately nodded.

"......W-Well..."

But she was unable to express her words. Yuri seemed to be hesitating and stuttering from embarrassment.

"What's up? You don't have to hold anything back. Aren't we companions?"

"I-I am Godou-san's companion...? Y-Yes. That is right."

Godou nodded to put his companion at ease.

Yuri's blush proceeded to extend all the way down to her neck, but still she nodded. Avoiding Godou's face, Yuri was staring downwards intently at his cross-legged sitting posture.

As a side note, even though it was an informal conversation, Yuri naturally maintained the formal sitting posture of seiza.

"My many apologies, for I was the one who brought this up... B-But, please understand. This is something very difficult for me to talk about. Especially since there is no particularly pressing problem or extenuating circumstances..."

Mouthing her words in rapid succession, Yuri was incredibly cute. However, she did not make any progress in providing further information.

Godou placed his hand on her shoulder with a smack and said:

"Don't worry. I am very grateful for Mariya's efforts this time. I've also been wondering what I could do on my end."

"Y-Yes. Then I shall not hold back."

Even though she said she would not hold back, Yuri still seemed rather hesitant and reserved.

"Umm... Even though it is not complete, I think I have gained substantial understanding of Sir Lancelot. S-So, what should be done?"

Yuri stuttered as she asked.

"What should be done?"

"In other words, w-when would be the time for instruction, is what I mean..."

Instruction meant the transfer of knowledge through wizardry.

However, typical wizardry was ineffective against Campiones, which included Godou. Hence it must be applied through the mouth, by injecting wizardry into the body via oral means.

Recalling this absolute rule, Godou's face went red.

He remembered. When relying on Yuri's spirit vision, that was the final unavoidable step.

"Ah, but if you haven't seen Lancelot's true appearance, then the [Sword] can't be forged, isn't now a bit too early...!"

"N-No!? Who knows what could happen in the future!?"

Seeing Godou retreat awkwardly, Yuri shouted in a rare moment.

"What if you begin a battle with Sir Lancelot and I happen to be absent from the scene...! I believe being prepared beforehand is only natural!"

"I-I guess. But using magic to transmit knowledge will quickly disappear from the mind, right!?"

No matter how you looked at it, this was a sudden act of impulse. Godou and Yuri both leaned forward.

Before they realized it, their distance had shrunk substantially.

"I think if the knowledge dissipates, then I will just teach you again. Hmm, no matter what, it is something necessary. For this cause I will labor without any complaints..."

Yuri spoke softly, blushing to her ears.

The subtle sense of desperation seemed to add a layer of allure to the Hime-Miko. Godou swallowed hard as he experienced in earnest the pleas of the beautiful maiden of utmost purity.

And it was impossible not to respond.

Furthermore, the two of them were alone in the Japanese-style room with the sliding door firmly shut.

It was customary for shrine staff to avoid this area during Godou's visits. Also, Godou and Yuri's hands were separated by such a minute distance, they were easily within reach.

As Godou and Yuri's gazes fell upon the tatami floor, they noticed that fact.

"T-That's right. This is only for the sake of battle... Yes."

"C-Certainly. I believe this is absolutely necessary..."

Whispering softly, the two gazed into each other's faces.

Their eyes shimmered with the light of recognition as accomplices.

Godou extended his hand towards Yuri. Hand and hand came into contact. Cherishing the Hime-Miko's hand which had been moistened by nervous sweat, Godou held it gently as Yuri gripped his hand tightly in return.

"Godou-san and I are companions, since that is true, this is fine.. . Right?"

"A-Ah yes. Should... be..."

As they drew their faces together, they seemed like lovers whispering sweet nothings to each other.

Just when the two had closed their eyes and were about to affirm the touch of each other's lips--

The sound of cellphones ringing. Both Godou and Yuri's phones rang simultaneously.

"It's Erica."

"This one is from Liliana-san."

As Godou checked out the cellphone in his pocket while Yuri looked at her phone which had been placed by her side, they read out the names of the callers. No other way, let's pick up.

Due to Godou and Yuri's serious personalities, neither of them could ignore incoming calls. They each brought their phone to their ear.

"What is it, Erica?"

'Look outside. We just arrived.'

"...Arrived?"

'Yes. Just do as I say and things will be clear.'

It can't be... Godou stared at the spotlessly clean sliding door. Having just had a similar conversation, Yuri also looked with shock in the same direction.

As the sliding door opened with a thud, everything did become clear after all.

Within Nanao Shrine, Erica was standing with a smile while Liliana knitted her brow. Most likely arriving directly from school, the two of them were still in uniform.

Part 2

"Just to be on the safe side, I'll say this first. I am not opposed to what you were going to do, okay?"

Erica spoke in a bright and clear voice.

"Yuri has been working hard these few days, so I can tolerate her stealing ahead a little. I've already told this to Liliana. I didn't come to the shrine for the purpose of disturbing you two."

"Even if you say so, the one who first made the accusation of stealing ahead was you, Erica."

Liliana retorted to her childhood friend and rival.

"After school, Kusanagi Godou had disappeared in a hurry. Then there is Mariya Yuri who had returned but was missing school. Putting two and two together, the situation was obvious. And there I was, trying to advocate 'this could possibly be an erroneous deduction.'"

"But the end result was exactly as I envisioned, right? See."

Erica pointed to Godou and Yuri in the Japanese room.

Finding their hands still held together, the two frantically withdrew them.

"Yuri, who has recently become a 'woman' completely, and Godou whose boundaries have grown increasingly lax. Under such conditions, would a private situation develop -- after all, a fully justified reason exists. Isn't this a simple formula?"

"...Well, my failure to notice that point is my stupidity."

Listening to the knights' conversation, Godou and Yuri exchanged glances.

They were both blushing and rather unsettled, agonizing over what they could say to lighten the mood, but completely stumped by the current situation.

"Kusanagi Godou, this is a perfect opportunity. I have things to say to you."

Hearing Liliana's stern opening line, Godou sat straight up.

"You should probably have realized by now, you are a playboy who pursues romantic relationships with multiple girls at the same time."

"W-Wait a minute! When did I become that kind of person!?"

Godou yelled from the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, Liliana shook her head bitterly.

Erica simply went "Well, that's who he is" and shrugged, casting a meaningful glance at Yuri. Both of them seemed to disagree with Godou's protest.

"Please remain quiet. A person with multiple girls in his inner circle, yet answers 'all of them' without hesitation when asked who is the most important or deserving of protection, is disqualified from objecting."

"Uh..."

Liliana's frank advice pierced straight into Godou's heart.

With so many reasons, was this karma's payback...

"In my opinion, it is basically time to go with the flow and leave past mistakes alone. If unusual situations are left alone and ignored, that sense of dissonance will disappear over time, becoming as if it was normal all along. And that is clearly a rare talent possessed by you, Kusanagi Godou."

"L-Leave past mistakes alone!?"

"Yes. Well, since it is you, you would naturally go with the flow, completely unaware anyway... But it is certainly true that there are many current issues. Let me point out a few to you."

Liliana's face tensed in an instant.

That awe-inspiring sense of beauty made Godou swallow his words of protest.

"I will not express objection to you and Yuri performing that ' ritual.' However, once the deed is done... You must tell us everything in full detail."

"T-T-T-T-Tell both of you!?"

"Alternatively, hide yourselves in a more skillful manner so that you will not be observed clearly by us like this time. Otherwise, umm, no matter what, I cannot help but feel something akin to jealousy and other negative emotions unbecoming of a knight's position--"

Liliana said shyly.

An emotion akin to jealousy, was none other than jealousy itself . Her shy expression made things completely obvious. But giving only two choices, either telling everyone everything, or doing things in secret without leaking any clues--?

What a tough challenge.

Imposed by such a demand that no ordinary high school student could answer, Godou was stunned.

I don't think I have the talent to comply with such a tall order...

"One more thing. This concerns our families."

Liliana continued.

"Erica's uncle, Sir Paolo Blandelli. You have met him before, yes ?"

"Uh yeah. That very handsome and cool uncle. I saw him once in Italy. Truly a great guy."

Godou had been overjoyed to learn that one of Erica's few blood relatives was a man, her uncle.

However, Godou was bewildered. Why mention him now?

"Umm... It is not really acceptable for you to have met only Erica's family. I would be most pleased if you could also meet mine. It does feel rather inappropriate after all, unless officially recognized by family..."

So what she wanted to say, was that? She wanted to introduce her family?

Godou began to feel anxious. But it's not like it can't be done, he thought. Might as well go with the flow to meet and greet the families of the many girls who had experienced so many trials with him. No matter what, this was the plain truth.

"Introducing Godou-san to my family...!?"

Next to him, Yuri was murmuring in shock.

"E-Even though you have met my little sister Hikari, you have yet to meet my parents or grandparents... But what should be done ? The family will be in an uproar over a meeting with the current Campione. The Mariya family never possessed the proper prestige and stature in the first place..."

Wondering "What should be done?" with great worry, Yuri seemed to be voicing her thoughts in succession. Could this be the beginning of a meeting with her entire family?

Godou felt a chill spreading from his stomach--

Just as he felt trapped by a mysterious sense of stress, his cellphone received a message.

Opening it to check, it was from Asuka. 'Isn't it time you followed through with your promise last time? I am very free today.'

After that, Godou confirmed with Asuka the meeting location and left Nanao Shrine.

Neither Alec nor Guinevere had showed any recent movements . It was still too early for Godou to enter the stage -- having concluded that, Erica and the girls saw Godou off.

'Well, it's been too busy recently anyway. Why not forget these troublesome matters for now and enjoy normal life for a bit? As long as you don't travel far, we can handle anything that happens.'

That was what Erica had said.

It was true. Staying on crisis alert was quite exhausting.

'By the way, why don't we all go together?'

Godou suggested cheerfully on impulse, causing all the girls to turn their gaze away. Was it an illusion or were they all sighing out of sight with an aghast expression?

'Even though it is a tempting invitation, I shall have to decline. Tokunaga Asuka would not be pleased.'

'Since it's her, you don't have to be concerned.'

'No. Last time when we met, she seemed rather wary of Erica and me.'

'By the way... Since we have the chance, I want to share my knowledge of Sir Lancelot with Erica-san and Liliana-san. Please go ahead and enjoy your time with your old friend.'

Hearing Liliana's rejection and Yuri's words which sounded like a newly married wife's advice of "you've been working hard lately, go take a good break," Godou accepted their well wishes and departed alone.

The time was 6pm on Friday night, the beginning of the weekend. The meeting place was in front of Ueno station.

Asuka and Godou were both residents of Nezu in the Bunkyou ward. If they wanted to go shopping, nearby Ueno (or Akihabara depending on what they needed to buy) was the top choice.

"Yo."

"Too slow. You're twenty seconds late."

This was the completely tactless greeting Godou received at Ueno station.

Godou was unfazed as it was typical of Asuka to scold with acrimony for minor lateness. Besides, they were friends who knew each other inside out, which was what mattered. As a side note, the childhood friend was wearing a hooded parka, a knitted top and jeans. Totally lacking in fashionability.

On the other hand, were Asuka to make a sudden stylish appearance, Godou would be even more troubled instead.

"Then let's hurry and go shop. Have you decided on a gift?"

"No, not yet."

"What an unreliable guy. Then let's have a strategy conference first. Tell me what does Shizuka-chan like?"

"I'm not too sure myself."

"You've transcended unreliability, Mr. Useless Brother."

"...Wait a minute. Last time when my mom found a forgotten bottle of German wine of 90s vintage, Shizuka drank it happily with me and grandpa."

"Don't treat these anecdotes from the overly unusual Kusanagi household as typical everyday family life!"

Glared at by Asuka, Godou shrugged.

He silently emphasized the fact that he could do nothing about his ignorance. Even if he wanted to get her a memorable gift or some kind of surprise, he was completely helpless.

"No need for these strange investigations. Let's just pick something passable and be done with it."

"I can't believe you can be so popular with girls in spite of such abysmal character. In a certain sense, this is my biggest surprise of a lifetime."

Asuka sighed at Godou's conservative idea.

"I can't be that popular, right?"

"Shut up! Your declaration of unpopularity has zero credibility. This I've already known since kindergarten. Like grandfather, like grandson. Isn't that exactly what the saying describes!?"

"Like grandfather like grandson whatever. Don't jump to conclusions while ignoring my personality!"

"I didn't jump to conclusions! Whether Grandpa Ichirou or your old acquaintances, everyone says the same thing!"

The two were caught in a dialogue that sounded like exploding firecrackers.

It had been quite a long time since his last heated discussion with Asuka. Even though Godou had been in the same school with her up until the end of middle school, they had been separated since high school. After that, they never had another argument like this.

If he had to give a description, this resembled his casual arguments with Erica.

However, the crisp sense of no loose ends could only be felt when doing it with Asuka.

"By the way, I have a friend who's troubled by popularity, and is a real lady-killer. Should we get some advice from that person?"

Recalling Sayanomiya Kaoru's mighty exploits, Godou suggested.

Well, even if the person providing counsel was a "her" instead of a "him," this kind of gender issue should not really pose a hindrance, right?

"Your circle of friends have become more and more suspicious lately... Your idea is rejected. We have to do it with our own ability without borrowing suggestions from others!"

"Ah, but wait a minute. In fact I've already accepted some sponsorship."

After learning the whole story, Erica, Yuri and Liliana had offered tokens of financial support.

Hearing Godou's words, Asuka went "Eh?" with great surprise.

"They all know that I am meeting with Godou?"

"Yeah. I just told them."

"I-I can't believe you had the gall to say it..."

"What gall? They even cheerfully sent me on my way."

Well, they did show some subtle expressions, but nothing worthy of note, right?

Faced with Godou's response, Asuka could only reply "I-I suppose" with a stiff expression. Then she spoke with a stunned and thoughtful expression:

"I-In other words, they think I've fallen so far behind in the competition that they don't see me as a threat, deciding it's not even worth their while to interfere... Oooh, though it offers advantages in a way, I have such mixed feelings... But then again, competing with that Erica-san is totally impossible from the very beginning..."

Asuka hesitantly muttered to herself in a voice that Godou could not pick up.

"What's with you?"

"Mmmhmm, nothing!"

"By the way, last time when you met Erica, you were acting really strange?"

This childhood friend was a "cool fellow," while Erica was also a social expert.

Wondering if they might be harboring some past grudge, Godou asked just in case:

"Do you hate Erica perhaps? Even though she loves being the center of attention and she's quite striking in truth, she is in fact quite an interesting and thoughtful girl. I think she can get along with you quite well."

"Ah, not at all. I don't hate Erica-san, not one bit."

Asuka seemed to be panicking as she randomly waved her hands in front of her.

"Let's put it another way. She has a 'good character,' right?"

Asuka was a "good fellow" while Erica had a "good character," that was correct.

What an apt description, Godou was impressed.

"I agree that getting to know her will be very interesting. Simply looking at her face or attire and I'm guaranteed not to be bored. Also, I think the only teenage girl in the entire world who can rival Auntie Mayo is Erica-san."

"Hmm... Pretty much."

His mother, Kusanagi Mayo. Godou nodded at the mention of her name.

"Whether Mariya-san or Liliana-san, neither of them can match your mother. In that sense, I believe Erica is very interesting. But well, how should I put it..."

Stopping there, the childhood friend showed a slightly sad expression.

"I knew it, only girls who transcend common sense would be hanging around a guy like you, right? I've thought over this a lot, but that's all. I don't hate her, and next time we meet, we'll surely become great friends."

"...I see?"

"These are the subtle stirrings of a maiden's heart that you haven't a single clue about. Anyway, a budget increase is good news after all. It's about time to accomplish our mission."

Asuka's crisp tones spurred Godou into action.

In the next two hours, the two of them wandered through the shops in Ueno.

They ended up buying a perfectly sized handbag. Since the design was not overly extravagant, it was appropriate for all occasions.

Abandoning clumsy surprises, the duo aimed for unambitious but guaranteed success.

Rather than Godou, they decided to have Asuka keep the item instead.

If kept at the Kusanagi home, the gift's existence might possibly be discovered by Shizuka. Thus they decided not to ruin the little surprise.

"Since it's already this late, let's grab a meal somewhere? As thanks for helping me, let it be my treat."

"Sure, but no need to treat me. I won't be able to sleep at night if I owe you a favor."

"Fine, no treat. How about that curry shop we haven't been to for so long?"

"You mean the one we visited so often back in middle school!?"

"Yeah. The one opened by the Pakistani who knows my grandpa."

"I'll pass! That's the place where as long as you or your grandpa show up, they start speaking freely in Urdu, taking out the hidden menu normally shown to Pakistanis only, and serve super spicy authentic native cuisine. It's way too international for me!"

"Those are its strong points. Isn't it a rather unique shop?"

"No thanks to that type of individuality! I don't need any special treatment, just mild curry properly catered to the Japanese palate please!"

Arguing amongst themselves with impunity, they bickered acrimoniously.

On Friday night, the streets of Ueno were rather lively.

A place with many foreigners. Consequently, a Caucasian girl with honey-colored hair and sky-blue eyes would not be considered a particularly wondrous sight. Nevertheless, she was clearly different from all the rest.

--Beautiful. She was a girl in her late teens with an outstanding sort of otherworldly beauty.

Her shaggy honey-colored hair was not very long. Tall slim build. An exquisite face like an angel's, displaying all-surpassing purity.

There was a natural impression of transparency, incongruent with the prosperous streets at night.

Like a cool breeze blowing across pastures, or perhaps, streaking across the deep blue sky.

Such was the atmosphere surrounding this beautiful face. Furthermore, she was dressed rather bizarrely -- her entire body was wrapped in a slightly dirty cloak down to her boots.

However, this vagabond attire only served to further contrast with her outstanding beauty--

It seemed only natural, but why? Godou thought incredulously.

"Hey Asuka. Do you know that woman?"

"Eh, who? ...Ah, isn't she so pretty? Wow~"

This was on a main street near Ueno station.

The exceptionally cool Caucasian beauty was waiting for the lights to change at the intersection.

Only when Godou looked at her and commented did Asuka notice the girl's existence. Furthermore, no one else in the surroundings seemed to be looking at her. On further thought, these people could not have abandoned the chance to stare at this otherworldly beauty, but rather, they did not notice her.

People looked at her like a roadside stone.

The same way no one would focus their gaze on the blowing wind.

No one glanced at the girl deliberately. This strange phenomenon -- could she be one of them? But Godou did not feel any battle spirit rising up from within, nor did his body fill with power.

In other words, he had not met a god.

Then she was a girl, right? Godou stared at her as she waited for the traffic signal to change.

Immediately following--

The girl suddenly turned her head and her eyes met with Godou's.

She smiled. Smiling like a breeze blowing across pastures mixed with sunlight, she walked towards him.

"We finally meet. You, my destiny."

The girl murmured with a refreshingly cool voice that matched her overwhelmingly transparent beauty.

Part 3

"Man of my destiny. The youth whom ought to partake in our shared fate... Now I am most certain, my journey's only purpose was to encounter dear sir."

The cloaked beauty was speaking in fluent Japanese.

"Dear sir must be feeling the same. Feeling that I am your fated rival, with my existence stirring excitement in your chest, surely your blood must be boiling? Hohoho, I know."

No matter how much Godou wished to deny it, her ostentatious manner of speech was greatly reminiscent of the gods.

Nevertheless, Godou's body and mind of a Campione's did not show any of the usual signs of encountering a god. Could she be a comrade of that particular Divine Ancestor instead?

"You... what's your name?"

"What? No idea. Or rather, I have forgotten it."

The mysterious girl replied calmly to Godou's question.

"Forgotten?"

"Ah yes. In actual fact, my origins, the reason I am here... All have been forgotten. I've been wandering here for days, with nothing but passion for sustenance, yes."

"What the heck is that?"

"I was thinking there was someone I was predestined to meet. That person is my fated rival. This sense of certainty has been seething quietly all along."

Extending her arm out from her cloak, the girl pressed her hand against her chest.

Despite being obscured by the thick fabric, the contours of the bountiful bosom were still highly conspicuous. Even with such an obvious slender physique, her feminine characteristics were so voluptuous.

But anyway--

The self-proclaimed amnesiac girl should be no ordinary mortal . Who on earth could she be?

A Divine Ancestor? Godou stared sharply at the girl--

"W-Wait a minute, Godou. Are you sure you are meeting this girl for the first time?"

Asuka interrupted, as if suspicious of something.

Godou frantically nodded, trying to defend himself:

"Uh yeah. Whether seeing her or speaking in person, it's the first time."

"Clearly then, isn't this a case of intense passionate courtship? In other words, love on first sight? And a foreigner too! Unbelievable, all these inexplicable people everywhere!"

"Eh? Love on first sight?"

"That's exactly what the girl's words sound like!"

Really? Godou was surprised by Asuka's furious accusation.

Why didn't I think of that. Put it this way, if this mysterious girl's declaration--

Godou stared at the girl.

The girl with neither name nor memory stared back.

Gaze met with gaze. Sight clashed with sight. Soul collided with soul. Indeed, Godou felt his heart stirring with excitement. He was bound in some mysterious way to this woman, that was what Godou sensed.

"Hoho... How embarrassing. Dear sir's gaze is unbearable. For there to be an existence that causes me to burn passionately from inside, this fact... truly brings shivers down my spine."

Flames of passion shimmered in the girl's eyes like a lover's burning desire.

But that was only a superficial resemblance. Godou knew. He had noticed what she truly desired.

But Asuka probably did not. If this misunderstanding persisted, things could get troublesome. Just as Godou considered various appropriate explanations, he was shocked.

What shocked him was the childhood friend's question.

"...Hey Godou. It's just a hunch, but you're not going to get into a fight with this person, right?"

As befitted the longtime friend known since kindergarten.

She was gradually garnering a vague sense of Godou's excited state from his attitude and demeanor. Just as Godou choked at the astuteness of Asuka's perception, he said:

"Nonsense. This person seems to be in a complicated situation, so I'll chat with her for a bit. If necessary I will call the police or ask people I know for help. Why don't you go home first?"

In order to avoid getting Asuka involved, he came up with this quick plan out of worry.

"By people you know, you mean your grandpa or your weird friends?"

"Ah yes, that's right... Wait a minute, grandpa aside, I don't find my friends that weird."

"Yes yes. Let's ignore that for now."

Asuka sighed and said:

"Well, I also have friends I wouldn't want you to meet, so I'll take my leave with this thing. But Godou..."

The paper bag held the gift for Shizuka they had just bought.

Snatching it away from Godou's hands, Asuka declared:

"You once described yourself as a pacifist. It's fine if you go overboard a bit in desperate times, but please be mindful overall. Okay, absolutely do not get involved with any messy conflict! Please bear this in mind!"

From the childhood friend came gratifying and honest advice.

But, can it be fulfilled -- Godou raised his chin at the amnesiac girl, motioning "Let's go over there." Smiling sweetly, the girl followed silently.

"Hey you. Could you be a god?"

"Yes or no? I have not a single clue."

"Or a Divine Ancestor? I've heard that they always look like little girls."

"...And so?"

Godou fired off abrupt questions in succession as he walked.

Any normal person would be rendered speechless by such questions but the girl listened calmly, simply giving meaningless answers in the end.

In this manner, the two came to Ueno Park. This plot of land included Ueno Zoo, the National Museum of Nature and Science, the National Museum of Western Art, the famous Shinobazu Pond, etc. This vast expanse of a park was an imperial gift to the city.

"I remember virtually nothing."

There were very few pedestrians in the park at night.

Walking side by side with Godou, the girl murmured:

"However. In the very depths of my blank memory, I can recall a few scant scenes... I am guided by the white star, while a certain someone is guided by the black star. That person is the one destined for a decisive duel with me, for we are ultimate arch nemeses who ought to lead each other towards death. This has been branded onto my battle-scarred soul."

"...Eh?"

Hearing the unexpected subject of her murmurs, Godou unwittingly halted his steps.

The girl stood still and gazed sharply at Godou in opposition.

"The one shrouded by the black star is my destiny. And my soul tells me you are that one. Your life and death and mine are intimately linked and inseparable."

"Perhaps... It can't be, you're Lancelot...?"

The deadly battle where the divine sword of the white star faced off against the divine sword of black annihilation.

Godou asked in shock in response to the girl's descriptions of that unforgettable scene.

"Lance -- lot...?"

Immediately, the otherworldly girl's face froze.

An intense domineering presence entered the girl's deep and mysterious eyes. Aloof solemnity surfaced on that beautiful face that was like the cool breeze blowing across great plains of pastures. Then her lips shaped themselves into a smile.

Godou felt power surging through his mind and body. Reacting to the divine presence, Godou entered a battle-ready state.

"Ho, hohoho... Yes. Rather, I believed in my destiny. That you would surely remember my name as a knight and call it out. Thus the enchantment I cast on myself has been lifted..."

"What!?"

Godou was greatly shocked to learn he was the one responsible for awakening her.

Lancelot du Lac. The white war god who appeared before others with an impressively cool and masculine image. Guinevere's Sir Knight who had killed Athena... That was the way it should be.

"Wait a minute! Even your voice is different, don't give me nonsense!"

In the past, the voice coming from the white armor had been a man's beautiful voice.

But now Godou was hearing a beautiful female alto voice. A girl's voice inviting of tender affection.

"This is not a battlefield, and one's armor has been removed. Displaying this Knight's original voice on occasion is condoned, is it not?"

"O-Original!? This is your natural voice!?"

Met with Godou's shock, the girl who answered to the name of Lancelot nodded "yes."

Indeed, it was a solemn gesture very reminiscent of the war god .

"Eh? Umm, but shouldn't you wear female attire!?"

"How rude. Having taken off one's armor, the beautiful queen of the equestrian tribes stands before you. There is no obligation to dress up as a woman. Kusanagi Godou, you are truly an uncouth fellow foreign to proper etiquette for treating a lady."

"Eeeeeeeeh!?"

As the beauty angrily aired her grievances, Godou began clutching his head in his arms.

Taken completely by surprise. But then again, the fact that she was no ordinary person had been apparent from the start.

But he never expected to be told something like this!

However, there was no disbelief or suspicion. The actions, words and presence of the beautiful girl before him -- truth be told, everything was consistent with Lancelot du Lac.

"Until just now, why didn't I get the usual restless feeling when I encounter gods!?"

"In order to slip past your wary senses, the [Insane Rush] enchantment was used to seal away one's memories -- this Knight cursed oneself to lose one's divine name and memories until you were encountered."

Beautiful Lancelot smiled with sweetness.

"Used an enchantment to seal away memories... What kind of magic is that?"

"Hohoho, an enchantment for provoking a rampage from a heart filled with dormant desire. Originally it was merely a trick to make someone berserk. Forsaking reason and dignity, consumed with rushing forward with insanity, more or less a minor adjustment to one's innermost heart. Like this time."

Godou understood. It was probably something similar to mental manipulation or hypnosis.

He did not expect such a hand from Lancelot whom he originally thought was only skilled at charging like a knight... But then again, going berserk from desire could be considered a sudden charge in a certain sense.

"A ruffian like one is not suited to be a palace knight. This Knight has enchanted oneself on occasion, thereby breaking out of the palace. Hohoho, it has been a long while since one last did this. "

Lancelot smiled as she spoke, prompting Godou to recall a name.

That's right. Verethragna was the same.

"The myths of the 'Knights of the Round Table,' have you heard of them? Those were the stories engineered by the first Guinevere and spread by monks and friars. They even devoted so much effort to elevating one to the 'greatest knight.' Oh well, even so, there is no way to disguise one's identity as a berserk warrior."

In Godou's first encounter with the god, Verethragna had also lost his memory and divine qualities.

The one who placed the Persian Warlord in such a state was the divine king Melqart of the Phoenicians. Through her own authority, Lancelot had done the same thing.

In the instant Godou understood, Lancelot approached in a flash.

Just like that, Godou entered her embrace. Wrapped by the fabric of her cloak, Godou could feel the touch of Lancelot's hand against his head.

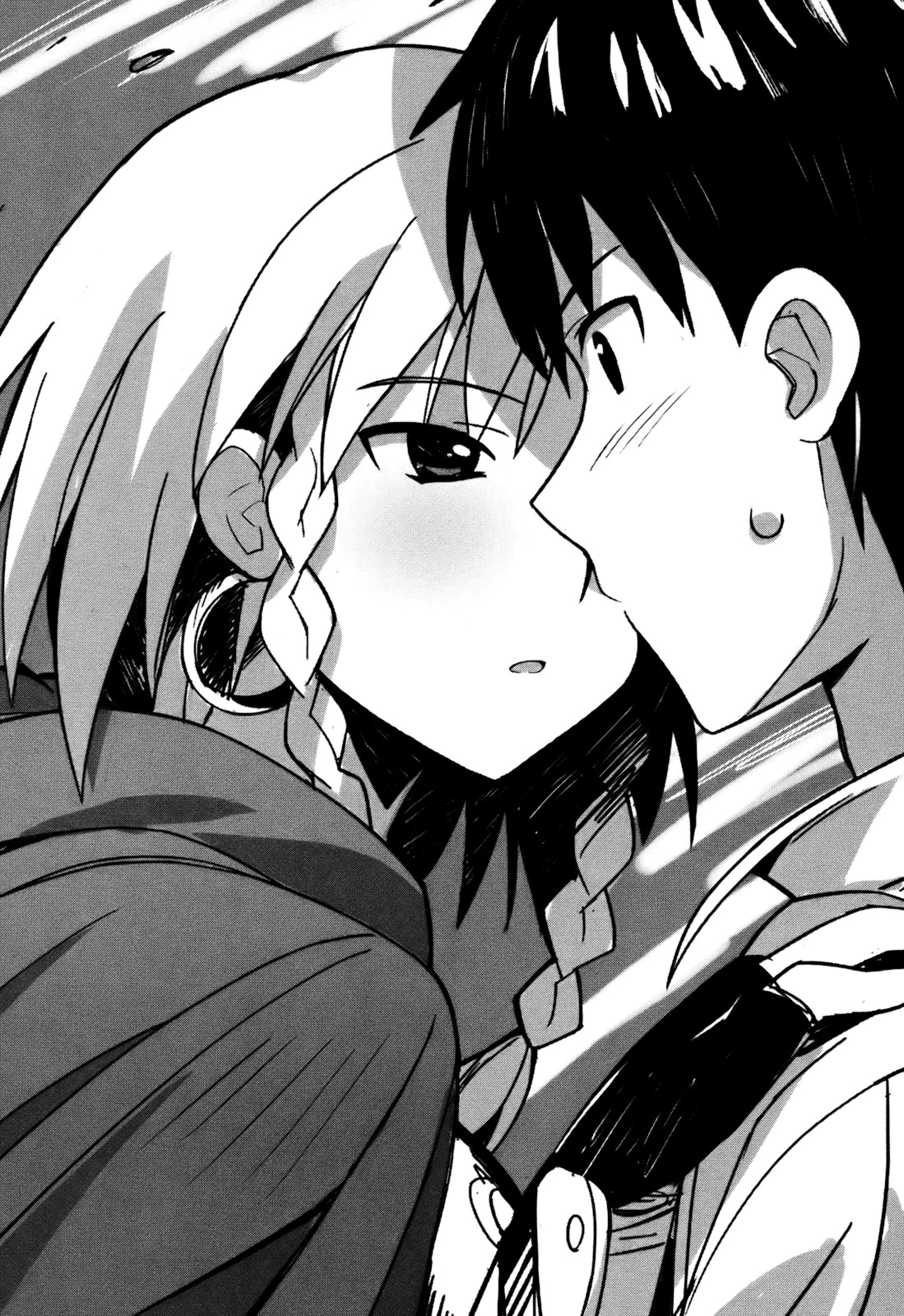
"This Knight even forgot one was a god. However, one believed in you, the fated enemy, and wandered without pause, certain one shall encounter you again. And so, the wish is finally realized..."

Oh crap. Godou smacked his lips.

Due to excessive surprise, he had let down his guard. Godou instantly tried to struggle out of Lancelot's restraints, mustering all his strength, but it was too late.

Lancelot's beautiful face gradually drew near -- and immediately the unexpected act occurred.

The refreshingly cool beauty seized Godou's lips with her own.



"For the sake of the beloved child, one must vanquish Alexandre Gascoigne. However, he is a formidable foe difficult to grasp. One cannot boast lightly of assured victory against such an enemy. So, Kusanagi Godou, combine your strength with this Knight and crush Gascoigne. Once the mission is accomplished, our deadly duel of destiny shall commence!"

Was this the curse of [Insane Rush]--? Godou gulped down a mouthful of air.

His mind and body of a Campione's was being ensnared by Lancelot's authority.

What a terrifying power of coercion. Reason and dignity were accelerating towards insanity. Impossible to resist. Blood was boiling disorderly, and his heart burned like a flame.

That's right. Defeat Gascoigne first. Then duel decisively with this woman afterwards.

Having made his decision, Godou twisted his lips into a savage smile.

"Take me to Guinevere. Let the show begin."

"Acknowledged, one's destiny."

Ending the kiss of the covenant, the white war god smiled gracefully and answered.

Chapter 5 - Black Prince versus Kusanagi Godou

Part 1

Alexandre Gascoigne was a god-slaying Devil King.

However, he did not have the kind of overwhelming vitality that allowed him to subsist on air. Neither did he have the lifestyle preference to endure living outdoors in the wilderness.

...But in actual fact, Alec displayed substantial survival skills in crisis situations. With that kind of ability, going so far as to build shelter on an uninhabited island, skillfully foraging and making fire, it was very possible to establish a new life of comfort.

Nevertheless, Alec was an adult male born in modern society.

He never wanted to emphasize that kind of vitality in particular . When staying abroad for extended periods of time, it became kind of customary for him to establish a local stronghold.

This time, he chose to lurk at the Yokohama Chinatown in Japan.

"Alec, what kind of Campione is Kusanagi Godou?"

"In short, a person who brings tons of trouble to his surroundings... Anyway, it's obvious I'm busy right now. If you want to chat, save it for later."

Alec quickly replied to Cecilia Cheung who was waiting in the living room.

He was in the kitchen, noisily stirring a Chinese wok, heating leftover rice to drive out the moisture.

"I consider my question more important than preparing lunch... "

The bespectacled girl who remained majestically expressionless by default, spoke indifferently as always.

"I hate being disturbed when concentrating on a specific task. It's almost ready anyway. Just be quiet for a moment."

Stir-frying the rice until individual grains were distinctly separated for a fluffy texture was the secret to authentic fried rice--

Wearing an apron, Alec stared only at the wok without even glancing at his subordinate.

The [Royal Arsenal] association's commander-in-chief and its Taiwanese member were currently in a luxury apartment at Yokohama's Chinatown -- in a room on the ninth floor of the eighteen-story building.

This was where Alec lurked.

The port city of Yokohama, facing Tokyo Bay, was not a place worthy of being called a stronghold.

Locked away by the labyrinth authority, the little island was merely a piece of rock. Even someone like Alec was not curious enough to want to live there.

As a side note, the two of them were not using a rented unit.

Cecilia Cheung -- as one of Chinese descent, she had asked a relative to provide her with this apartment.

Naturally, the relative in question was no ordinary person but a core leader of the Chinese wizardry association, the [Nine Heavens Syndicate]. This relative was partial to the renown of Black Prince Alec.

Had they chosen to lurk in the imperial capital's confines, the History Compilation Committee would likely have pinpointed their residence's location.

Hence Alec made a request to the [Nine Heavens Syndicate], thereby obtaining accommodations in Chinatown, a place known to the Japanese wizardry world as the "Concession."

"Here... Take these to the table over there."

"Got it. Hey Alec, I've wanted to say this a long time ago, you really are a diligent person."

Cecilia sighed as she spoke. She surveyed the unit as she carried out the crab fried rice, Chinese chicken soup and seafood salad that was portioned for two.

This 4LDK[9] unit had been kept neat and tidy without a speck of dust.

The unit had already undergone extensive cleaning in preparation for the Devil King Campione's arrival. But in addition to that, Alec himself devoted time every day to clean and tidy up the place.

'Servants and chefs? I can take care of myself. I don't like strangers buzzing around in my surroundings. Also, please keep your comments to yourself.'

That was the order he had issued with a stiff poker face.

As a side note, given sufficient living standards, Alec did not bother with making effective use of every room.

All he needed was a single bedroom with a bed, closet and a desk. Researching or contemplating deep into the night, it was common for him to lie on the sofa when suffering from insomnia. This was enough. Whether a 4LDK or a 1K unit, having space to live was sufficient.

Even so, he still tidied up every nook and cranny in all the rooms. That was the kind of disciplined life Alec led.

Thirty minutes earlier, Cecilia who was staying at a relative's house, had just returned with food she bought from Chinatown--

'You call this crab fried rice!? The rice grains are soggy and they used frozen crab meat -- not only that, it's poor quality stuff that's been frozen and refrozen multiple times. Let me show you how authentic fried rice is done!'

Saying that, he began firing up the wok. At the same time, he started preparing the soup and salad with great familiarity.

"Even though I seek expediency, there are things I cannot compromise on. If a residence is uncomfortable, I will personally improve the conditions. If I want delicious food, I will cook it myself. That's all there is to it."

"That is one thing amazing about you -- a philosophy that works equally well whether in a city or an uninhabited island..."

Boss and subordinate sat face to face at the table, chatting as they enjoyed their meal.

"Well, that Kusanagi guy sure brings troubles to others."

Satisfied with the fluffy texture of the fried rice, Alec chatted in an equally fluffy mood.

"That guy's modus operandi is to go around claiming to be a pacifist. That's how he catches others off guard. If he is regarded as a dangerous object from the start, then people will notice as soon as he approaches. However, since he successfully disguises himself as harmless, people relax and he uses the opening to cause mass destruction."

Alec had been observing events in Japan during the commotions caused by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Lancelot.

As a result, he had gained a clear understanding of the Campione Kusanagi Godou.

"Furthermore, his ability to deceive women is unparalleled. I don't know how he did it, but he seems to have won the demonic cult leader's approval, and become her sworn little brother..."

"As befits one of Alec's peers."

As Cecilia concurred, Alec frowned slightly.

"Don't even think of comparing me with those other guys as if we're in the same category. There's actually nothing similar, for I am different from those who act impulsively without thinking."

"Alec, you should pay more attention instead. Try not to be in denial over your own nature, okay?"

"Nonsense. I am a rare person who has thoroughly grasped his own strengths and weaknesses."

"Is that so? By the way, I was thinking..."

Alec's confident protest was simply brushed aside by Cecilia with indifference.

Hmm. The furrow on Alec's brow deepened.

"Such a troublesome character. Even if we do not recruit him as an ally we should not make enemies out of him. But Alec, you always look like you are taking a battle stance. Clearly you're lacking in caution."

"No. That idea of yours is very flawed. It pains me to say this, but your perception is lacking."

Alec shook his head at the clever but inexperienced Cecilia.

"Flawed? How so?"

"The fact that you keep thinking of *them* as normal people. Listen well, when dealing with people beyond common sense like Campiones, be sure to abandon naive notions such as 'negotiations can bring peaceful resolution,' 'the other party is human too,' or ' humans can reach mutual understanding.' These people should be understood as 'ferocious beasts' instead."

"...Really?"

"Ah yes. It must have been seven years ago, when I was on an expedition in California. I met Los Angeles' John Pluto Smith. Even as a Campione, that guy was predisposed towards rationality, so I thought I could develop amicable relations easily. At least, it shouldn't become hostile. Consequently, I couldn't even voice out one tenth of the thoughts running through my mind when I met him."

"...What were they?"

"Thoughts like 'you're an adult and you still haven't graduated from your masked disguise phase?' 'Always using playacting speech and behavior to garner attention like some kind of narcissist.' Also 'Making others wait every time in order to arrive fashionably late,' that kind of stuff... And much more. I'm sure anyone who met him has had all kinds of thoughts like this."

Recalling the past encounter, Alec explained.

"However, all that effort turned out to be a waste. We had clearly established friendly relations already, but a week after our encounter, Smith and I had an all-out fight. It pretty much reached a stalemate..."

"How did it come to this?"

"Maybe the timing of our encounter wasn't right, or perhaps I can't keep up with that overly egotistical personality of his... In the end, we had a ceasefire and signed a non-aggression pact, agreeing to keep out of each other's affairs."

"The one with the greater ego should be you, right..."

"Anyway, that was it. I've experienced many similar incidents in the past."

Interrupting Cecilia who seemed to have many opinions to offer , Alec asserted:

"When the opponent is a Campione, conflicts will arise if they are coming, while peace talks will occur naturally only if they are possible. Consequently, trying to change anything only results in wasted effort."

" "......" "

Without reaching any consensus, Alec and the silent girl stared at each other.

Anyway, has she been convinced to change her inappropriate views? Just as Alec puzzled--

"By the way, are things over at the 'island' fine?"

Cecilia changed the subject. Perhaps she had grown tired of the fruitless discussion.

"No problem. An alarm will be transmitted here if anyone approaches that labyrinthine sea. If anything happens, I can return immediately."

The "island" which was the legendary Avalon, or perhaps known as the Floating Island.

The ancient island raised up by the Heavenly Reverse Halberd in the waters near Yokosuka. Using the authority of divine speed to turn into lightning, Alec could fly there in an instant.

"That island is the place where King Arthur... No, his prototype the war god sleeps, right? He should be embracing that [Sword] called the whatever divine sword of salvation while sleeping there, right?"

"Exactly."

Answering Cecilia's question, Alec sipped a mouthful of soup.

"If that was the way it should be, Alec, why did you have to use that artifact? By common logic, should that island not exist originally?"

When Alec went to Los Angeles, he had ordered Cecilia to retrieve an artifact.

Asked about the secret treasure that Alec had discovered on an Indonesian island and assigned to a local trusted acquaintance for safekeeping, Alec replied indifferently.

"But of course, it is more than necessary. It is the crucial item needed to summon that Guinevere to this island. Predicting it would surely come in handy at some point, I had the foresight to keep it hidden rather than displayed at headquarters."

The museum at St. Ives was where his stronghold was located.

It was the place where Alec often exhibited the things he discovered or borrowed.

However, everyone knew it was the Black Prince's home. None of his subordinates who frequented the place were weak in combat . As a final safeguard, Sir Iceman was stationed there, but Alec still would not keep any item there which would attract truly dangerous enemies.

"True. But Alec, it is very hard to believe how you came to be so certain of something that should be there but was not there."

"On the contrary. Precisely because it is the resting place of the 'King of the End,' that possibility is very unlikely instead. For that island is the place the Divine Ancestors have sought in vain over the past millennium and more."

Thinking of Guinevere, Alec continued.

"That witch must have considered this a long time ago -- if the search continues to be fruitless, what could be the reason? Perhaps someone has cleverly concealed the master's location. The sleeping master, what ways could he have been hidden... Something like that."

It must have been the ancient members in the upper echelons of the History Compilation Committee. Apparently they saw the threat presented by the "King of the End" and decided to conceal his existence. If I were in their shoes, how would I hide him?

What Alec pondered from there was what Guinevere never considered. This was the difference in their thinking.

"Well, even if the conclusion is correct, I have no way of speculating beyond that. Simply considering the current situation, there are twenty possible outcomes. All I can do is set up a gambit which handles all of them. Simply stated, this is all in preparation for capturing Guinevere."

"...What are you planning?"

But at that moment, Cecilia said softly:

"Even though you are so talented... You must be quite a failure in dealing with 'women.'"

"Nonsense. I am completely different from Kusanagi Godou. I'm not going to obsess over women, nor am I going to regret my decisions simply because of getting duped by females. You owe me an apology."

Alec retorted angrily, but Cecilia shook her head vigorously.

"That's not what I meant. What Alec's plans incur, are likely the unpredictable thoughts and feelings of women, infatuation, obsession or the like. Because it is unconditional love, consequently, the type of enemies you have the most trouble handling are basically 'women.' That Princess is a very good example."

"Stop trying to find fault in strange ways. That type of women, I do not have any trouble at all."

Secretly reminiscing Greenwich's Princess, Alec exclaimed.

At this time, a "familiar" manifested on the table in the form of a [Black Calf]. However, it was only the size of one's palm. Its round eyes glimmered with definite intellect.

The calf which suddenly appeared out of space, sat next to the bowl of fried rice gazing up at Alec.

"A visitor?"

Alec puckered a smile. This was the familiar born from the authority of the ferocious bull god Minos.

It had manifested for the sake of managing and guarding the labyrinth Alec had created. Through eye contact with the calf, Alec instantly received intel.

(In the waters around the labyrinth, a strong magical presence has appeared.)

"Divine beast? Fake god? Or Lancelot?"

(Unknown. But not a [Heretic God].)

"In other words, it should be something above a divine beast. Looks like Guinevere has finally made a decision, cautious though she may be. I will go there immediately."

Alec leisurely spooned fried rice into his mouth as he spoke.

It was not so urgent that he did not have the leisure to fill his stomach or get a change of clothes. So, which jacket should he wear today? Alec pondered as he ate.

Today will probably be quite busy, unless time was used wisely --

Part 2

On the next day after the war god's ambush, Kusanagi Godou came to Shounan.

Outside the window was the vast and deep blue sea. The location was a seaside cafe.

Yesterday, Lancelot had enchanted Godou with a secret technique for making desires run amok. This resulted in the formation of an exotic partnership between enemies.

"Why must a meal be partaken at such a venue..."

Guinevere grumbled disapprovingly.

The Witch Queen who always kept a serious expression was showing such an expression for the first time. Nevertheless, Godou ignored her.

Satisfying my hunger is the most important thing right now. Godou took a huge bite from his sandwich containing chicken, organic vegetables and herbs. Tasty! The leafy greens of the rucola lettuce were very fresh, the thin slices of tomatoes were quite fragrant, and the salty taste of the chicken made it even more delicious.

"I won't stop you if you want to stay away from towns and crowds, but I'm not interested, nor do I share that preference. While on the move with me, do try to conform to my way of doing things, got that?"

Slowly swallowing his sandwich, Godou declared leisurely.

Sitting opposite Godou were two girls. Divine Ancestor Guinevere and cool-looking Lancelot with her short honey-colored hair.

Guinevere was rather striking in her usual black formal dress.

Whenever a beautiful girl dressed up in Gothic lolita fashion, crowds of onlookers naturally gathered. Whether staff or customers, all were staring at Guinevere with admiration.

"In any case, this lowly establishment of philistines is inadequate for one of Guinevere's stature. Kusanagi-sama, given you are also one of high stature, do express some concern for a lady!"

Unsettled by people's stares, Guinevere spoke with her face all red.

On the other hand, Lancelot sitting next to her remained calm and composed.

"Is this not wonderful? To be an adorable child. Even alone in the wilderness, you will be gazed upon by the blowing wind and the constellations filling up the sky. Birds, bugs and beasts are all watching you. Humans likewise. Those of one's stature merely need to display corresponding solemnity."

Saying that, she raised her coffee cup to her lips.

Naturally, the Divine Ancestor and the war god did not have a clue about coffee etiquette. The coffee they were drinking had been Godou's judicious choice.

Lancelot had removed the slightly filthy cloak she was wearing yesterday and changed her clothes.

A white knitted sweater over a shirt together with black pants. Rather tasteful and conservative attire.

"But Sir Knight!"

"Hohoho. Being called that in this current state, is slightly embarrassing."

The short-haired beauty smiled at the furious one she protected.

In actual fact, Lancelot was drawing an equal amount of attention. As a knight she openly accepted it all, letting everything meld into the scenery of the cafe.

Nevertheless, these words of advice failed to appease Guinevere's indignant emotions.

She finds things unbearable simply because of the crowd's stares? Godou found it rather incredible. He would have thought she was a woman less petty than that--

"Ah yes, really?"

Discerning the reason for Guinevere's displeasure, Godou could not help chuckling to himself.

"What are you laughing about, Kusanagi-sama?"

"Well, this. I think you are unexpectedly cute in certain ways."

"Cute? What are you referring to?"

"You should know very well, Guinevere."

"What!?"

Guinevere's face instantly flushed all red.

"Kusanagi-sama, exalted as you are as a Devil King, how could you speak so rudely to the Witch Queen? Please be mindful of your own behavior. Why on earth do you have to call Guinevere cute!?"

"Because you are very stubborn."

Godou smiled mischievously and teased.

"Since yesterday, I have taken all matters into my hands. Finding so many things inconsistent with the great Witch Queen's expectations, you are quite displeased, right?"

Last night, Godou had received Lancelot's curse.

Led by the beautiful war deity, Godou came to the seaside where Guinevere was waiting.

'Thank you for your patience, Kusanagi-sama. For you to accept our humble invitation, we are overjoyed from the depths of our hearts--'

Guinevere offered a welcome in her usual tones full of pretense. That child-like smiling face was overflowing with the Witch Queen's glee from having snatched a chance for victory. However, Godou declared without even looking at her:

'Whatever. I accept the invitation.'

Then he extended his hand towards Guinevere's face.

The one and only Witch Queen could not help but feel her body stiffen instantly. During this time, her slender chin was being clamped between Godou's index and middle fingers, forcing her to lift her gaze towards Godou's face.

'Remember this well. After I take care of Gascoigne, I will conclude matters with that Lancelot. I will not allow you to interfere. Otherwise, prepare yourself for the consequences. You do want to revive the one called the 'King of the End,' right?'

'Y-You are saying you will kill Guinevere...!?'

'Of course not. I won't do that. However, there are many ways to obstruct you from reviving him. You'd better not even think of going against me when I'm in top form."

Godou had been speaking softly.

However, he was now speaking in a voice so fearsome and solemn he himself could not believe it possible. Her spirit broken, Guinevere only nodded vigorously in earnest. Then she cast a helpless gaze towards her protector.

'Apologies, beloved child. One has enchanted Kusanagi Godou with [Insane Rush], a curse that allows him to fight Alexandre Gascoigne before dueling with this Knight. It is exceedingly simple ... But as expected of a god-slayer, he possesses substantial dignity. Even under a curse, it would appear that forming an alliance of equals is impossible.'

'Equals? Don't be ludicrous.'

Hearing Lancelot's words, Godou ridiculed.

'Just leave everything to me from this point onwards. If an overcautious woman like Guinevere were to be in charge, even what is rightfully yours cannot be won back. Until the battle with Gascoigne begins, you are both under my command. Only this way can lead you to victory."

This declaration caused Guinevere's beautiful face to pale.

On the other hand, her beautiful guardian deity simply went ' Hmm...' and crossed her arms, muttering as she contemplated. In the end, no objections were raised. Deep down, she must have agreed with Kusanagi Godou's words.

Thus Kusanagi Godou became the leader of this impromptu alliance of enemies.

After that, Kusanagi Godou commanded Guinevere to prepare food and lodgings using her magic.

Deciding during the night that "Tomorrow will be the assault on the island," he prepared by making detailed plans. A good night's rest to receive the morning, a good meal in preparation of the battle -- that was how things came to this.

Then he came to this seaside cafe with two beautiful girls in tow , thus leading to the present.

"What displeasure, there's nothing of that sort!"

Teased by Godou, Guinevere denied vehemently, her face flushed red with embarrassment.

But he had most likely hit the mark, for she clumsily turned her face away from his gaze.

"Hoho, don't be shy. Even as the Witch Queen, that's so childish of you. All I said just now was you're cute, right? That's not something I dislike."

"Eh?"

Godou's smile gave Guinevere a severe fright.

Even though decades had passed since her successful rebirth, the Divine Ancestor was still a pubescent girl. The Witch Queen held terrifying magical power and prestige. Nevertheless, Guinevere was now showing innocent fear as befitted her appearance.

"Children should act like children and let adults do the work. Even though I'm not really an adult, I should still be more reliable than you."

"What!? How rude! Guinevere is indeed the witch who was born countless years past--!"

"No matter how many years ago you were born, nothing has changed your child-like appearance. In any case, in addition to Lancelot, you now have one more person to rely on, at least until Gascoigne is defeated. I think it's fine for you to throw childish tantrums from time to time, right?"

Just like that, without even the passage of half a day.

Godou had already begun to understand the witch Guinevere.

In short, she was just a child. Although it was unclear whether Divine Ancestors had the same concept of growth or adulthood, at least it was apparent that Guinevere's mental development was not that mature. This was probably why her vision was so narrow and she did things overcautiously.

"I-In that case -- I will be very troubled. Guinevere has her dignity..."

"Well, go ahead and indulge your nature as you like. That's fine too. Stubborn and obstinate girls who don't think too deeply or try to be pleasing can be quite cute too."

Watching Guinevere's awkwardness and embarrassment, Godou commented.

A girl who brought to life the fantasies of many boys, of course she was very cute.

But only now did Godou realize this contrarian fetish of his. It turned out Godou had a thing for girls who possessed a difficult side -- examples included Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena.

Come to think of it, his little sister Shizuka and the childhood friend Asuka also had such facets in their personalities.

Realizing this, Godou unbelievably found them even cuter than before.

"K-Kusanagi-sama, you're the worst!"

On the other hand, Guinevere abruptly turned her face away.

Apparently she could no longer endure Godou's smiling gaze. But even turned away, her head was still held up high, secretly watching Godou's movements.

Her feelings had not been hurt, rather it was probably the opposite.

Even though this was very cute of Guinevere -- Lancelot's next move was completely unexpected.

"By the way, Kusanagi Godou. These two here are not the only ones being stared at by the crowd, eh? There seem to be many girls gazing at you with passion in their eyes."

"Really? I don't feel it."

In spite of Lancelot's remark, Godou did not feel anything special.

"Maybe you're mistaken? Guys like me are a dime a dozen. I may be standing out of the crowd due to being with you two, but whether it's really 'passion in their eyes' is up for debate."

"Hoho. Not at all. In actual fact, you are rather manly."

Before he knew it, Lancelot's face had drawn near -- towards Godou's face.

In front of him was the refreshingly cool face of this beautiful girl. Separated by mere centimeters, her lips were about to make contact with Godou's. From a different angle, it probably looked exactly like a kiss.

At this moment, the girlish cries of "Iyaah!" could be heard from behind.

Turning his head back, Godou found a pair of girls, who looked like first year middle schoolers, staring at him in an apparent state of panic. They looked like they had been frightened by something.

Godou smiled silently and waved.

This was not a forced smile but one that carried the message of " my bad." A momentary smile. The two girls immediately smiled back and waved.

Compared to before, Godou no longer kept his distance from girls as much.

After receiving Lancelot's enchantment, Godou seemed to have broadened his horizons. There was a sense that redundant common sense and preconceptions had been abandoned as he acted in accordance with his heart's desires.

"Don't act so strangely all of a sudden. It could cause an uproar, you know?"

After responding to the girls, Godou grumbled to the beautiful knight.

"What? This Knight only worked mischief in an effort to please the girls who were gazing at you. Pray forgive this Knight. But what one said was true, is it not?"

"Open to question. All you did was scare those unfamiliar girls with strange behavior, right?"

Retorting to Lancelot, Godou noticed something.

"You, it's rather rare for gods to recognize ordinary humans."

"If you compare it to the way humans gaze upon ants crawling all over the floor, the ants do enter their view after all. Whether they are truly understood is a separate matter. Anyway, that is the truth of things."

Narrowing her sky-blue eyes, Lancelot continued.

"Accompanying you through the world of humans, one simply tried to look upon them briefly. That's all. However, the one who truly gazes at this Knight, there is but one human with whom our hearts are linked as one. That is you -- Kusanagi Godou, dear sir, alone. Please do not forget that."

"As if anyone could forget. I'm the one who's gonna defeat you."

"No, this Knight shall defeat you."

The two gazed into each other's eyes, their faces drawing closer, muttering in conversation.

Godou and Lancelot's behavior yet again drew girlish cries of " Iyaah!" from behind. However, Godou did not turn around this time. Nothing was currently more important than the "enemy" before him.

"Sir Knight and Kusanagi-sama, displaying such mutual love..."

Guinevere suddenly whispered.

There was no tone of sarcasm but an honest remark straight from the heart.

"Nothing that prosaic. Rather it should be better described as rotten fate or the like?"

Saying that, Godou withdrew his face from Lancelot's.

From an onlooker's perspective, this might have looked like a " lady on each arm" but the truth was nowhere near that kind of bliss. This was merely a makeshift alliance of enemies for the purpose of defeating Alexandre Gascoigne.

The second duel once matters were settled, was what Godou truly anticipated in earnest.

Thereafter, Godou and the two girls left the cafe and went towards the sea.

Out of sight of others, he commanded Guinevere to perform flight magic. Enveloped by a flash of white light, Godou and the Witch Queen, as well as the beautiful war deity, took flight.

Their destination was the territorial waters of the Devil's Sea.

Godou had earlier instructed Guinevere to prepare a "ship" there.

Godou quietly filled with excitement. After defeating the Black Prince, Godou will have his second duel with Lancelot du Lac as an eulogy for Athena.

Of course I will be the victor--

Battle spirit twisted Godou's lips, manifesting in a savage grin on his face. This was probably due to the curse, right? Godou focused his mind on battle without any hesitation.

Next time a crisis arose, he would probably go with the flow and enter battle readiness instantly.

However, there was currently no need to be led by the flow. Godou thirsted for battle from the depths of his heart, giving his soul free rein to indulge in excitement, arousal and belligerence. Such freedom, what sense of liberation!

Kusanagi Godou was no longer hampered by doubt. He had become a pure warrior, a tyrannical king.

Part 3

Taking the form of lightning, Alec flew across the sky above Tokyo Bay.

Leaving Cecilia behind in Chinatown, he took action alone. Even though many people considered this a bad habit of his, it could not be helped. After all, few existed in this world who could keep up with his speed...

Viewed from the Yokohama Chinatown, the sky was clear and sunny.

But now, where the avatar of lightning streaked across, the sky had become dark and cloudy.

The weather changed -- no, this was the effect of divine or similar existences. These clouds must have been summoned by Lancelot, Guinevere or something under her command.

"Well I never."

Maintaining his lightning avatar, Alec muttered.

Hard to believe, but there was a "sailing ship" cruising on the ocean below.

The wooden ship was reinforced by iron plating in various places and equipped with several cannons. This was a product from the Age of Discovery -- when the British Empire had been expanding its colonies all over the world.

Those white sails, raised up high, caught the incoming wind and drove the ship smoothly forward.

The ship had three masts and its length was less than twenty meters. However, no crew was visible. Even though manpower was normally essential for operations, the sailing ship seemed to be moving along like a fully automatic machine.

This was due to the fact it was a "ship" summoned and moved by magic.

The sailing ship advanced across the ocean beneath the dark and cloudy sky which heralded a storm's coming. Overall, it gave off a terrifying solemnity like a ghost ship.

Alec could feel his body and mind in high spirits, filled with power for battle.

A [Heretic God] lurked somewhere in that ship!

"Thunder of the blue sky!"

Chanting the brief spell words, he instantly unleashed his authority.

Immediately, the light burst forth from the lightning avatar's body with a thunderous crash -- forming thunder and lightning, striking at the ship on the ocean beneath. A wooden ship would probably have ignited as a result, but the magic ship remained unharmed.

The [Heretic God] riding on the ship had used magical power to deflect the lightning.

Alec smiled with a chuckle. After all, the ability to fire off electrical strikes while in lightning avatar form was simply incidental to the authority of divine speed. Unable to cause significant harm to gods, it was simply an opening shot to signify " Alec has arrived."

The flying lightning descended onto the deck of the sailing ship.

Landing, he regained his human form. Alec surveyed his surroundings to seek signs of his enemies.

"Over here, Alexandre-sama."

Guinevere's familiar voice called out to him.

The blonde Divine Ancestor who resembled an antique doll was stepping out from the cabin along with Lancelot the knight in white armor.

"Have you finally steeled yourself for a decisive conclusion, Guinevere? It happened faster than I expected."

Having dealt with and competed against this Witch Queen for the past eight years, Alec had come to understand Guinevere's personality and way of thinking completely. Consequently he was rather surprised that she would decisively risk everything on an all-in gamble within a matter of days.

"Yes. Despite all sorts of concerns, Guinevere managed to muster her courage and overcome hurdles, all thanks to Your Highness' advice of 'Rely on yourself.'"

"What about Lancelot? As a [Heretic God], he definitely would be a troublesome opponent."

Alec addressed Guinevere who had nodded in approval.

The white armored war god wielded Excalibur -- the lance made by polishing and sharpening the decrepit Divine Sword of Salvation, and stood silently beside the Divine Ancestor on standby.

Ever since the encounter eight years ago, Alec always spotted him hanging around like her guardian angel.

But now he had become a true [Heretic God], wielding the divine lance Excalibur as his new weapon, for the Holy Grail that absorbed Athena's essence had revived. In actual fact, Guinevere's faction currently held rather formidable power in their hands.

And for the sake of weakening them, for obtaining victory--

Alec had prepared "Avalon" using his labyrinth authority. This was for the purpose of shaving off a portion of Guinevere and Lancelot's battle potential.

"No, Gascoigne. The one who agreed to assist the beloved child Guinevere is not this Knight. One simply stands guard over her, requiring neither promise nor request."

"...Oh?"

Hearing Lancelot's manly voice sounding out from the helmet, Alec frowned.

He had suspected such a possibility. In fact, he already had a premonition the moment he selected Japan as the stage for the final battle.

Discovering embers that should not be discovered, igniting fires that should not be lit--

Precisely because such a guy existed, Alec truly understood this principle deeply.

"Yes, that person is a ruffian who doesn't mind his own business, nor does he know how to treat a lady. Nevertheless, he does seem more or less reliable. Things are in his hands."

Guinevere's cheeks blushed slightly as she spoke.

Alec went "Hmm?" in puzzlement.

What was going on? This girl who always acted so high and mighty ever since our first encounter, was now getting flustered over meeting a boy, being at a loss over that wonderful feeling of heart racing... Was this what people called charm?

For him to have managed to make this witch display such expressions and behavior of girlish inexperience--

The displeasing premonition was turning into absolute certainty .

"In other words, your faction still retains yet another trump card , is that right?"

"Ah yes. That's me."

The third person came out from the cabin. Alec was not surprised to hear his voice.

The other guy was the hypocrite who always insisted he was a pacifist. From Alec's perspective, that kind of belief was completely worthless. Spouting those kinds of words from one's mouth brought only shame, simply trying to sugarcoat one's own crimes.

A few months ago, Alec already had a feeling they would fare poorly in compatibility.

Consequently he looked at Kusanagi Godou's face and said:

"Well... The moment I decided to battle in Japan, I already expected it would come to this."

Alec simply shrugged.

When two Campiones were present in the same country, it was common for them to become unwitting centers of commotion, arbitrarily rampaging separately.

Entering confrontations with each other was another common occurrence.

"What surprises me is the fact that you, the hypocrite, would actually take Guinevere's side."

"Actually, this was Lancelot's suggestion."

Watching Godou giggle, Alec was completely certain.

Compared to last time, Godou was far more resolute -- such was the impression Alec garnered.

"I have to reach a decisive conclusion with that Lancelot without distractions. You are a hindrance. I will first take care of this interloper in my way before I have a satisfying duel with Lancelot. Gascoigne, fight me here."

"Would you mind if I refused?"

"Sorry. Regrettably, cancellation is out of the question."

Kusanagi Godou's rapid change in this short time. Was that the key? Alec secretly nodded to himself.

In actual fact, the Campione of Japan and the Black Prince stood in stark contrast to each other.

Troubled by his own true desires, unable to take a step forward. This, together with hypocrisy, were equally outstanding traits of Kusanagi Godou. Now that time spent on hesitation was reduced, his actions taken after committing to a decision showed extraordinary initiative. Was this why his indecisiveness was not so visible now?

In contradistinction, Alec never showed a moment's hesitation towards seeking what he desired. Immediate action was always taken.

The hypocrite and the one who posed as a villain. The indecisive man and the man who never hesitated.

"On a certain level it is quite a solid partnership you have here. Very well, I accept your challenge. However, I'm one of those who are fleet of foot. If you can't keep up, I will leave you behind without a thought."

"Sure. I will keep up with everything I've got."

"In spite of everything, I never expected you to join forces with the Divine Ancestor. No, rather than you falling under the witch's charm, it appears that Guinevere has been charmed by you instead ."

Alec kept getting the impression that Guinevere was looking at Godou with eyes of concern despite making preparations with composure.

Witnessing this scene, Alec sighed.

"Ch-Charmed--!? How rude! Please speak with greater prudence, Alexandre-sama!"

"No need for prudence. This is simply the result from objective observation."

"No one has been charmed by anyone. This is simply a temporary alliance until my battle with Lancelot. It's about time to start."

Godou gave a slanted glance towards flustered Guinevere and calm Alec, then said:

"Lancelot, Guinevere. Leave matters to me here. You two go first."

The Divine Ancestor and the war god immediately responded to his command.

Lancelot whistled once and the white divine steed descended from the sky. It was the flying divine horse seen before.

Deftly mounting the horse, the knight lifted Guinevere's pubescent body and sat her on the saddle.

The white divine horse soared across the sky. Their destination was obviously the Floating Island.

"Sorry, I personally have no reason to stay here and fight."

Alec instantly turned into lightning. Even if Kusanagi Godou could move at god speed, he had no way of flying.

Getting rid of him by flying was the easiest solution. However --

"Ama no Murakumo, please."

Kusanagi Godou raised his right arm.

Alec's body of plasma was released and sent back to human form. Turning into lightning made him especially weak against counter magic. That arm over there must hold some kind of ability to dispel spells and spirit powers.

"Looks like you have something handy there."

"Ah yes. Quite an ingenious thing, here. It absorbs power from magic, thereby dispelling it. I was wondering if absorbing some of your power might force you to revert, so I tested it out."

Hearing Kusanagi Godou's reply, Alec got serious.

Looks like there's no easy way out after all. It can't be helped -- Standing upon the deck of the sailing ship the Divine Ancestor had summoned through magic, he faced off against the Japanese Campione. The battle was about to begin.

Part 4

The enemy was the Black Prince, Alexandre Gascoigne.

Challenging another Campione to a duel on his own volition, Godou recalled all information he had received regarding this enemy's authorities from Alice, Erica, Liliana, and last night from Guinevere and Lancelot.

The Devil King of divine speed who manifested as lightning.

Though reputed to possess other troublesome authorities, his greatest distinguishing characteristic was "speed."

"You really do have a power similar to mine..."

Alec spoke. He also seemed informed about Kusanagi Godou's authority.

He probably watched the fight against Lancelot, and he did mention the Great Sage incident before. It would be prudent to assume he already had a firm grasp of Godou's capabilities.

"Did you know, so-called powers of 'lightning speed' are unexpectedly difficult to control. Particularly during chaotic situations such as this."

Indeed. Godou nodded in wholehearted agreement with Alec's description.

Regardless of maximum speed, it was extremely difficult to move the body according to the exact image in the mind.

"However, once you get used to this skill, it does turn out to be a rather useful. Like this."

Completely unable to see the immediate attack, Godou found himself flying through the air by the time he noticed.

--I'm flying!? Somehow Godou was hovering in midair. Naturally, he immediately crashed back down onto the deck.

From the sensations of the body, it felt like he had fallen from a height of ten-odd meters.

"Guah!"

The "ship" summoned by Guinevere via magic.

As Godou fell back onto the deck of this ship, he moaned in pain.

What happened just now? Godou stared in shock at Alec. The tall Black Prince in his stylish black jacket did not seem to have moved.

Godou could feel the back of his head hurting. Sharp pain could be felt all over his body.

"I too cannot be considered human, what with this supernatural resilience. Falling from that height, ordinary humans would probably die, or at least suffer who knows what kind of sequelae even if they survived."

In the instant Alec spoke, Godou was surprised to find himself falling again.

"Guah!"

Falling on the deck once more, his whole body felt the violent impact.

It was true. Were he an ordinary person, dying instantly would not come as a surprise. But Godou endured the intense pain from his entire body as he pushed himself up. Struggling, he got up on his feet.

Godou himself was also a user of god speed. Even though it was only speculation, he seemed to have caught a rough idea of how the attack was conducted.

He could probably find a method to counter it. Watch how I intercept it...!

"Just lie down obediently. It'd be a great help if you could save me some effort."

"Give me a break, it's just a few throws. I fully intend to finish the job."

Alec smiled at Godou's retort with a "Hmph."

Godou believed his guess was right. Using divine speed, Alec charged forward and stopped just in front of Godou, grabbing him and jumping into the air. Then at the appropriate moment he threw Godou down while he landed splendidly himself.

If Godou unleashed god speed to the max, he could probably achieve the same feat.

Using that particular ability would make his body exceptionally light, making the weight of a single human feel like nothing. Hence it was a skill that could accomplish the same thing.

"I'm far too stubborn in the fact I never want to enjoy fighting while moving at that kind of speed. This manner is highly efficient, not bad right?"

"That I can agree..."

Godou had faced the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's continuous god speed attacks before.

Nevertheless, he had no intention of imitating Alec. Given the ridiculous defenses and endurance of gods and Campiones, causing sufficient damage via this method would take way too much effort. During the entire time, he would need to suffer great strain while trying to attack continuously using god speed that was difficult to control.

At this point in time, he did not think it would be a wise decision.

Besides, the Great Sage's divine speed was probably fundamentally different from Godou's god speed.

"...Well, this does make things all clear."

Godou secretly muttered to himself.

Even though they both held the same weapon, their levels of familiarity were completely different. Alec had completely mastered the power of god speed. If Godou tried to fight in the same manner, he would only lose pitifully.

Godou activated Verethragna's fourth incarnation, the [Camel].

The power that could only be used when heavily injured, it was the incarnation which possessed beast-like combat ability, leg strength and endurance.

--He's coming!

The [Camel]'s instincts sensed Alec beginning to make a move.

Rather than seeing through the attack itself, the beast-like instincts sensed the enemy's decision to attack -- the aura of killing intent. In the instant Alec proceeded to disappear, Godou kicked with his right leg as if trying to shatter the chin and skull of an enemy standing before him.

At the same time, something moving at abnormal speeds approached then evaded this kick -- that was what he sensed.

Alec reappeared where he was standing originally.

"A skill to capture my speed... Who knew a guy like you was able to achieve something like that?"

"It's because others have mercilessly done the same to me before ..."

Alec appeared rather amused while Godou endured his pain as he responded.

The ones who could see through god speed and even reverse the situation to their advantage were Luo Cuilian as well as Salvatore Doni.

The [Camel] incarnation held combat potential approaching those superhumans. Even if Godou could not do the exact same thing, a rough imitation was well within his ability.

"Hmm... Well, it's only an imitation after all. I think if I were to attack continuously, you will soon reveal openings."

Sharp indeed. Godou nearly choked in response to Alec's perceptiveness.

Even though he did it successfully by chance, from the feeling just now Godou surmised he would probably get hit one in three times. Even so, this level of hindrance was enough to prevent his opponent from attacking at will.

This probably counted as making effective use of things.

"That said, I don't particularly like engaging in a trade of blows with enemies. Let's change things up a bit."

Alec smiled as he declared. In that very instant...

Crash! The magical sailing ship began to shake intensely as if pitched by an earthquake. Some sort of massive object was lurking in the sea, clashing violently with the bottom of the ship--

Crash! Another quake. The underwater assault continued.

What had arrived from the sea? Leaving the puzzled Godou behind, Alec nimbly jumped up, landing lightly on the ship's mast.

"My apologies. Trading blows like in boxing doesn't suit my style! I decided to bring an escort expressly for times like this. It's slightly disgraceful but it should be enough to satisfy a hot-blooded one like you!"

True to his word, Alec stood back and watched coldly from above as he called out.

An escort!? It was this guy's doing!? Godou tried to maintain balance on the rocking ship as he ran along the edge.

Looking down at the sea brought a great surprise. There was a massive silhouette deep in the water, in the shape of a gigantic humanoid.

The thing resembling a giant was apparently attacking the ship, causing it to rock intensely. The shadow had long hair as well as a feminine physique. The protrusions on its back were evocative of wings. The lower torso did not have legs but resembled a fish tail instead. Godou recalled the information on Alec that Alice had shown him.

Indeed this must be the [Faceless Queen].

In all likelihood, that man possessed five authorities. [Black Lightning], [Judging Furies], the [Labyrinth], [Weird Greed], and finally, [Faceless Queen].

This was the queen bound by a single absolute rule, her "face" must not be exposed. Apparently if anyone catches a glimpse of her face, she is immediately unsummoned. Nevertheless, her powers included flying in the sky, swimming like a fish in water, and destructive power that could shatter a tower of steel. Not only could she appear and disappear elusively, her body size could also be adjusted at will.

Disregarding the restriction requiring her face to stay unseen, her powers were all-purpose indeed--

Crash! The ship rocked again.

It was going to sink if this continued. Once a hole was opened at the bottom of the ship, it would be game over.

Alec was described as a mage in addition to possessing the power to fly through the air as lightning. Even if the ship sank he could probably escape without problems. On the other hand, Godou would have no choice but to swim once forced into the sea.

--In that case, I'll have to summon that guy!

Godou instantly made his decision.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Yelling the spell words, Godou called upon Verethragna's fifth incarnation.

From the surface of the sea, a pitch-black and majestic [Boar] was summoned, its size no less massive than the queen. The incarnation which could only be summoned for the purpose of pulverizing a massive object. Naturally, the target this time was the queen.

Aaaaoooooooooooh!!

The divine beast's roars reverberated across the vast sea.

Truth be told, if this guy turned out to be unable to swim, we'd really be in trouble. Godou secretly worried.

But that was not the case. Floating on the sea, the black [Boar] suddenly charged forward, as if jet skiing or like a torpedo piercing through the water, slicing through the sea and moving straight towards the goddess to collide at high speed!

On the other hand, the goddess, only visible as a silhouette, was rather agile.

Nimbly turning her body in the sea like a fish, she evaded the [Boar]'s straight charge.

However, the [Boar]'s competitive spirit was greatly roused. After the attack missed its mark, the [Boar] quickly made a U-turn and charged at the queen again.

Thus began the water battle between gigantic monsters.

The faceless queen somehow conjured and tossed massive spears in the water to attack as she evaded the charging [Boar].

As the [Boar] engaged the amorphous shadow in close quarter combat, its tusks could occasionally be seen piercing into the enemy.

At the same time, the queen's thrown spears also tore open the pitch-black hide. Out spewed otherworldly black blood, dying the seawater an inky color.

"Now I see, you too are an owner of a ferocious beast. Haha, it's not really necessary to compare the ferocity of our pets in the sea!"

The moment Alec's laughter was heard, the queen's figure disappeared from the sea.

Having lost its target, the charging [Boar] fruitlessly parted the waters as it charged around.

In that instant, Godou suddenly noticed. He felt an extraordinary sense of danger.

Relying on instinctual warnings, Godou jumped forward as if diving into a swimming pool, not even glancing at Alec who was supposed to be standing on the ship's mast. Had he diverted his attentions to look, it would probably have been too late.

At the same time as Godou's jump, Alec appeared at the position where Godou had just been standing.

Stabbing suddenly with weapon in hand, the attack missed thanks to Godou's leaping escape.

"Didn't you say exchanging physical blows was not your style!? "

"What? As long as it's a one-sided affair that I can end in one or two hits, I suppose it can be accepted as a guise."

Godou's blunt criticism was casually dismissed.

Even so, for that guy to deliberately choose that kind of object as a weapon -- Godou was quite impressed by the tool held in Alec's hand. What a truly strange man.

The stabbing object turned out to be an antique fountain pen. The type of pen which required ink to be filled in from the tip. Even as a writing tool it was out of fashion, let alone being used as a weapon.

"Hoho, this? I just happen to have no interest in carrying crude fighting implements. Well, this thing suffices for emergencies."

Noticing Godou's gaze, Alec threw the pen like a dart.

The pen sliced through the air with a whistling sound, causing Godou to evade by jumping to the side.

Missing its target, the pen embedded itself into the ship's deck. Not just the pen tip but even half of the shaft was buried into the deck. Apparently magic had been used to increase damage.

...It's really a first time for me to fight this type of enemy.

Godou marveled to himself as he stood back up. Using so many tactics of conspiracy and deception, Alec virtually eschewed conventional upfront battle. Using all sorts of ways to evade the enemy's attacks as he searched for openings to land a decisive blow, that was how he concluded his battles.

Dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee -- no, rather he was like a devil spinning a chessboard.

Victory was definitely beyond reach if he allowed Alec to control the pace of battle. Godou was struck deeply by this revelation. As feared, was the decisive ultimate technique the [Raptor] after all...?

To be used as a tactical tool instead of relying on its speed.

Godou understood now was the time to use his trump card.

Part 5

Lancelot and Guinevere advanced towards the labyrinthine Devil's Sea.

Overlooking the vast sea beneath them as they spurred the flying white divine horse. Sitting on the saddle, Guinevere entered a stance in front of the knight who held the reins.

"Beloved child, it is almost time to summon Fake Minos."

"Understood, Sir Knight."

Guinevere nodded in acknowledgement to the protector who was once again fully armed.

"O Holy Grail! O Fountain of Life, legacy of the white goddess! I beseech you to answer to her daughter the goddess' descendant!"

The golden urn appeared in front of the flying divine horse.

That was the Holy Grail which had absorbed all of Athena's essence. Suddenly manifesting from empty space, it hovered in the air.

"King of Crete, father of the minotaur, His Royal Highness the priest of live sacrifices. Guinevere implores the sky, praying to the earth, petitions the ocean for Your Royal Highness to grace us with your presence once more. Please listen to a young girl's pleas, and send forth your fragments to the earth!"

Guinevere used the spirit power of [Divine Summoning]. This was the secret technique unique to Divine Ancestors, for manifesting minions which once served them when they were still goddesses -- divine beasts of water and land.

However, the spell Guinevere was currently using involved an additional step.

Spell words for summoning a beast on the level of the gods, were enveloping the Holy Grail. Next the golden urn began to change in form. The head of a ferocious bull with the nude figure of a man below the neck. Standing tall at ten meters or so.

This was the likeness of the god Minos whom Alec had slain on Crete eight years ago.

Using the Holy Grail's magical power to manifest a fake god -- required turning the Grail itself into a god. During this time, the Grail's original functions were lost, thus disabling the divine lance Excalibur which relied on the connection with the Holy Grail.

Fake Minos leisurely flew through the sky, next to the soaring divine horse.

They were advancing towards Avalon which had been raised by Alec. Furthermore, the Devil's Sea which sealed this island away -- that was the authority which Alec had usurped from the god Minos.

Even if this sea that had been turned into a labyrinth was openly contested from the air, it would still take days to break through.

However, if power was borrowed from Fake Minos who possessed the same authority--

Under the guidance of Fake Minos, Lancelot and Guinevere finally entered the territory of this Devil's Sea. Avalon, along with the 'King of the End' who supposedly slept there, was the goal!

In the current battle, Black Prince Alec held an absolute advantage through his divine speed.

Even someone other than Kusanagi Godou would have reached such an instant conclusion. But Godou's observations of his enemy went a little further.

Black Prince Alec was a man who loved to show off his wits. Rather than using divine speed as a "weapon for battle," he most likely viewed it as "a tool to establish tactical advantage" instead.

He held an overwhelming speed advantage over his enemies.

As a result, offense and defense relying completely on speed -- were not used. Instead, he used speed as an advantage to maintain dominance in battle.

Through the use of speed, action could often be taken faster than the enemy.

Movement times could also be shortened greatly, allowing near instantaneous mobility and the option to disengage from the battlefield.

Incoming attacks could be evaded using divine speed with absolutely no chance of being countered.

Grasping this dominance firmly in his hands, battles could be ended in one fell swoop. This was Alec's usual method and path towards victory. He took great pains to shorten the time spent moving at divine speed, as if trying as much as possible not to squander it.

Probably because divine speed was a difficult authority to control, it was being used in this manner.

Experienced with the same ability, Godou understood this point . First of all, simply using it placed the body and mind under great strain. Particularly in Godou's case, this burden manifested in the form of a time limit.

In addition, precise movements were very difficult.

Learning to switch between fast and slow moves had allowed him to fight effectively. However, each time Godou accelerated or decelerated, he had to divert a substantial amount of concentration ...

Regardless of which manner of usage, it was readily apparent that Alec was an expert in divine speed.

Godou had no hope of winning a battle decided by speed alone. Nevertheless, the [Raptor] -- the incarnation of god speed was still necessary.

The opponent's advantage was obvious indeed, but looking at it the other way, was it really impossible to expose an opening--

Just as Alec made a thrust with his fountain pen again, Godou activated the [Raptor]. Like his opponent, he only applied god speed for an instant, evading the pen tip as quickly as lightning.

As a result, the [Boar] rampaging in the sea disappeared.

"I was wondering when you'd finally use this. Now is the time, I see."

Witnessing Godou's god speed, Alec commented with great interest.

At last, Alec raised his speed to the maximum and began running across the deck. Godou also sped up to the same speed to pursue after him.

Once he tangled with the Black Prince, he would probably be able to imitate that "efficient manner" of attack.

With this goal in mind, Godou ran after Alec. But he could not catch up. Though it was true that their speeds were equal, their skill in speed adjustment differed too greatly.

Alec had been running with divine speed fully unleashed. Godou pursued at the same speed.

Then Alec suddenly shifted from high gear to low gear, causing Godou who continued at top speed to overtake the decelerated Black Prince.

This resulted in a reversal in position with a huge gap of separation.

Next, Alec jumped into the air.

Godou ran towards the place Alec was poised to land. But Alec reduced his god speed, thereby ignoring the existences of free fall and gravity, and descended at reduced speed.

Consequently, Alec leisurely landed at a spot where Godou had already run past.

Yes. So-called god speed was actually not the ability to "move at high speed from Point A to Point B." Rather, it was the ability to " ridiculously shorten the time taken to travel from Point A to Point B."

As a result, it was able to perform movements that were physically impossible.

An ordinary person's running motion was bound to a two-dimensional plane. When using the [Raptor], Godou's body became exceptionally light, allowing him to move in three dimensions.

However, Alexandre Gascoigne's god speed was four dimensional.

With even time under his control, it was truly four dimensional movement. Catching up to an opponent like this man was impossible!

Thus time ticked away fruitlessly.

"Well then... Your current condition means things have come to an end, right?"

Alec finally declared before Godou.

Kusanagi Godou was crouching on the ground, his hand pressing against his chest. During the chase, the [Raptor]'s time limit ran out. As intense pain filled his heart, the body began to paralyze.

"The god speed you possess, turns out to be the type where the strain builds up with persisted use. From the fact that you could reach top speed in an instant, I already suspected that much."

Alec explained calmly. Was he that assured of victory?

In that case, this was probably the best opportunity...

"In contrast, the type that increases their speed gradually usually suffers much less strain. Well, since this is something you cannot choose, there's nothing you can do about it. Luck -- or rather, your manner of usage is no good."

Not really. Godou eyed his prey, waiting for the right moment.

Crouching in his stiffened state, Godou was in no condition for direct combat. However, this was precisely how he could tempt Alec to become careless... Hopefully.

"Just as I mentioned, I'm not some benevolent soul who would give up on an opportunity to lay down a one-sided beating on someone helpless. No matter what, I must catch up to that naive Guinevere and end the show."

The Black Prince declared and took out his fountain pen.

Indeed it was time for Godou to reveal his real trump card.

"Ah yes, really... It's time to end things. Go forth, Ama no Murakumo!"

Enduring the pain in his heart, Godou summoned the partner residing in his right arm.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi suddenly manifested. Godou swiftly sliced using the divine sword -- or not. He was unable to depend on this stiff body to perform such an action. However, the self-aware divine sword flew by itself towards Alec.

The tip of the blade was going to pierce Alec's heart--!

However, Alec naturally held the swiftness of god speed. Even against a sudden slashing attack, he could simply evade.

As expected, sparks exploded all over his body. This was the sign he was about to use god speed.

"What!?"

Alec displayed shock instead.

Everything occurred as Godou had planned. This [Steel] had the power to copy an enemy's authority. Using that power, Godou copied Alec's divine speed.

As a result, Ama no Murakumo was currently flying with lightning speed--

Piercing into the Black Prince's chest--

However, the image of the gentleman dressed in a stylish black jacket dissipated like a mirage.

"...It failed eh."

'Naturally. A man who could even slay god, cannot possibly be slaughtered so easily. Of course he would have suspected a trap.'

What Ama no Murakumo had skewered, was nothing but an afterimage left behind by divine speed.

This guy, he's even able to make [Decoys] through god speed?

"It's a bit early for you to immobilize yourself to bait this trap. An admirable gamble, but you were too careless in the last second. This is checkmate. You've lost."

"No, not really..."

Despite being unable to even lift a finger, Godou was smiling. His lips were shaped in a savage grin.

"I will defeat you and duel with Lancelot. This curse compels me to do so. In that case, I still have other powers I can use."

Words of magic were uttered from his mouth in an instant.

Godou could feel Lancelot's divine power surging forth from the depths of his heart.

"What!?"

Alec must have noticed it, for a cry of surprise escaped from his lips.

"That Lancelot possessed the authority to cause others or oneself to go insane and rampage according to dormant desire.

Swallowing that kind of thing, I am now relishing in our battle. After all, this is a curse which liberates one's desires."

"And that is how you abandoned your prided hypocrisy? By accepting such a troublesome curse!?"

Godou stood up as he ignored Alec's query. Kusanagi Godou's body and mind were currently in a berserk state. Submitting to the desires magnified by Lancelot -- he was completely overwhelmed by the notion that "I must fight that war god." Furthermore, the curse converted the command of "Defeat Alec" into power.

Lancelot's curse was the authority to cause one to go berserk for the sake of satisfying desires. When exhaustion and injury brought one to their limits, this curse restored ferocity to the body and mind, providing new power -- giving the needed strength to stand up once again.

Of course it was not limitless, but for Godou's current level of exhaustion--

Using Lancelot's divine power, the body that had reached its limits began to move once more. All the injuries suffered from the fight to this point were instantly healed. Even though Verethragna's incarnations could only be reused after a full day had passed, all those incarnations were restored.

The pain and paralysis from the [Raptor]'s use had also disappeared. There was nothing to stop him from fighting now!

"Gascoigne, I think I more or less know all your tricks now. The second round begins... Things have not been going well for you eh. Furthermore, you are being delayed here while Guinevere and Lancelot approach their destination. I think you no longer have much time to waste."

"Tsk. Is the battle from just now going to repeat again?"

Learning Godou's intentions, Alec made a face as if about to spit . Since he did not actually perform the act, he managed to preserve a gentleman's dignity.

Well then, the real battle begins now. Godou yelled out with excitement:

"Sorry, but please play with me until I'm satisfied, Gascoigne! A chance to fight a man who has slain gods is very rare. Wouldn't it be stupid to let such a thrilling experience end so easily!?"

But at this moment, Godou discovered interlopers had arrived.

Godou smacked his lips. It came as no surprise, for conceivably, it was time for them to hurry their way here. Even so, he could not help but feel a bit miffed.

This was clearly an opportunity to enjoy himself unhindered, yet those girls had to come and interfere--

What meddlesome girls. Godou shrugged. Was he obliged to appease their displeasure in the manner of temperament they preferred? He should quickly get out of this situation...

Blue light descended upon the deck.

Naturally, it was Liliana Kranjcar's flight magic.

As the light subsided, not only did the silver-haired knight and Erica Blandelli emerge, but Mariya Yuri as well. The three girls' faces seemed to be saying "What kind of mess did he get into again ..." as they carried expressions full of concern.

Chapter 6 - Towards the Island of Destiny

Part 1

Kusanagi Godou had gone missing--

Last night, Erica was home when she received the news.

"Though we don't have any bodyguards or the like, the people who keep track of Kusanagi-san sent this report."

It came from the History Compilation Committee member, Amakasu Touma.

After receiving his call, Erica, Liliana and Yuri gathered at the living room of the Sayanomiya residence even though it was late at night.

"Hitting it off with an unidentified beauty, they reportedly went off hand in hand. It's incredibly hard to believe, but that girl seems to have successfully applied some kind of hypnosis on a Campione ."

Hearing this, Erica sighed.

"I've mentioned this before, but whatever... When facing a girl, the number of openings he displays is truly despairing, that's Godou for you."

"And here I go thinking he had learned a little lesson after the recent encounter with Guinevere."

"Hasn't this occurred enough... Since it's impossible for us to accompany him every moment of the day, he must learn to be alert when he's on his own."

"So, Amakasu-san, where did Godou-san go afterwards?"

Yuri questioned the History Compilation Committee member after listening to Erica and Liliana's laments.

"Ah, that's right. In actual fact, we have ten-odd staff divided into three teams to keep a close watch on Kusanagi-san, but none of them were able to report what had happened. We don't know what the mysterious girl did to them, but they were all discovered unconscious."

"I see... If Amakasu picked the team, they should all be competent."

Hearing Amakasu's report, Erica put her emotions aside.

"In that case, even if one of them -- no, even if the entire team attacked in concert, the same outcome would likely have occurred. Conversely, we should be relieved by the lack of casualties so far. It is imperative that we catch Godou and snatch him back from that suspicious woman."

"Yes. If that is the case, our first priority is to track down the location of Kusanagi Godou."

"Isn't it redundant to search for him? Based on the current situation, the eventual destination should be that place."

Just as Liliana expressed her resolve, Sayanomiya Kaoru spoke up.

The History Compilation Committee Tokyo Branch Chief and beautiful cross-dressing Hime-Miko. Furthermore, she was the girl whose talents rivaled Erica Blandelli.

Clearly she had reached the same conclusion as Erica.

"That's right. Rather than wasting time on something like that, it would be more efficient to focus our search on methods to lift Godou's curse."

As Erica expressed agreement, Kaoru suddenly smiled.

Well said. Those two words seemed to be on the tip of Kaoru's tongue. Presently, Sayanomiya Kaoru was helping Kusanagi Godou in a capacity beyond her position as a leader in the History Compilation Committee.

Perhaps, Kusanagi Godou's own "Round Table" would be established sooner or later in due time--

In that event, Kaoru would likely occupy the position of cardinal bishop instead of chancellor. Also, she was probably going to share the strategist role with Erica the paladino and mistress of the palace. They would both offer strategies continually in a competition of power and influence.

This was the future Erica envisioned in response to Kaoru who was smiling like an accomplice.

"What you mean by destination is the Floating Island? If the mysterious woman were in league with Guinevere, and their goal was to use Kusanagi Godou in their designs, it must be that place with great certainty..."

Liliana asserted.

She was likely indifferent to covert political struggles, loyally serving Kusanagi Godou as his bodyguard knight and housekeeper. She should be the subordinate who nobly insists on performing these roles that combined official and personal duties.

"On the other hand, what if Prince Alec arranged this for the purpose of leading Kusanagi Godou away from the Floating Island ? Well, no matter what kind of conspiracy, abduction and assassination... Are probably not a concern, right?"

Ruling out assassination, Liliana knew very well.

Deceiving Campiones was possible, but surprise assassinations were not. These were people who had slain gods and possessed unreasonable survivability and violent streaks. Liliana did not think he could become an assassination target without a struggle. If Kusanagi Godou were to be caught in such a crisis--

A battle with the would-be assassin, wrecking half of Tokyo, would probably happen first?

Imagining that sort of scene, Erica smiled wryly and replied:

"I doubt Prince Alec is involved in this incident. It doesn't suit his style."

"I agree. Tactfully described, he is 'a man who remains a youth at heart.' To be more frank, it could be said 'even though he never hesitates to commit what he considers to be cool crimes, he is a man who refrains from this category of despicable acts no matter what.'"

Kaoru also supplemented with her distinctive style of exposition.

"A fifteen-year-old's nocturnal motorcycle joyride. The mere mention of this kind of anecdote reminds me of that man. Setting a honey trap is definitely something he would never do."

"Also, if Guinevere-sama were to cast an enchantment on a Campione, it would require taking a risk akin to subduing a wild beast alive -- it is difficult to imagine her taking such measures unless it is related to the Floating Island battle."

"The only ones capable of taking on a god-slayer, are gods and other god-slayers. Indeed that is the truth."

Yuri nodded gracefully and replied to Kaoru with unconcerned tones.

"Hey Yuri, what's your opinion on the woman who abducted Kusanagi-san? If it was only a witch, even a Divine Ancestor, it would be an easy matter to handle. Otherwise, things could get rather tricky."

"What makes you think that...? Right, I do have a rather disquieting feeling."

Simply shutting her eyes for a moment to examine the notion in her heart, Yuri replied quietly.

"Truly astounding, a terrifying existence. Such is the feeling..."

I get it. Erica nodded. Kaoru must have intentionally brought up a series of ambiguous statements. Given Yuri was one of the most outstanding users of spirit vision, the veracity of her heart's answer was quite convincing.

"Perhaps you've sensed the arrival of a new goddess, Yuri?"

"Impossible to be certain. Though I would not be surprised if it turns out to be true."

Yuri solemnly bestowed an oracle in response to Erica's question.

Even in chaotic situations where the truth was unclear, Yuri always acted as a beacon lighting the path ahead. Bright and dazzling on occasion, dim and feeble at other times.

The one and only guide providing illumination in the darkness, that was the role Yuri performed.

"During critical moments, it's probably best to summon her to the scene? It does offer the most efficacious and practical effect when deploying emergency measures."

"True. But I think it's not fair for us to burden her too much with overly high expectations."

Erica expressed dissent to Kaoru's murmurs, causing the cross-dressing beauty to smile wryly.

"Naturally. Even though I said practical effect, it often turns out to be a rather limited effect."

Having decided their direction, Erica and the girls began their operation.

Amakasu had headed out in a rush to prepare for their rescue target's inevitable appearance in the Floating Island situation. This Japanese ninja mainly specialized in wizardry related to covert operations, was very knowledgeable in myths and legends, and was a man who could competently handle all sorts of situations.

The days when Erica was Kusanagi Godou's lone attendant were already long past.

At some point in time, the young Campione's faction was beginning to flourish with an abundance of exceptional talent. Nevertheless, they were still akin to the cream and toppings used to decorate a cake, for if the foundation -- Godou himself were absent, everything would be meaningless.

While Erica and Kaoru continued to lead the discussion on possible countermeasures, a phone call was received.

'Hey Erica, how are things coming along with the affair at hand ? Ah yes, of course it wouldn't do for a proper lady to indulge in morbid curiosity. Nevertheless, I am still an important member of the organization responsible to the world despite having stepped down from my duties, right? It is only natural to be properly informed about the state of affairs with which I am involved.'

The result of the brief conversation was the enlistment of a reassuring comrade.

Campiones were demons who slew gods and usurped their sacred authorities. Nevertheless, it was a mystery why these [Kings] always became centers of chaos and commotion, getting other people involved. Perhaps the reason why so many people got swept up into their antics was related to these Campiones' individual wills and ways of thinking.

Getting a real sense of this, Erica concluded the preparations and spent the night together with her comrades.

Then the next day arrived--

Receiving a report from Amakasu saying that "something strange is happening in the Devil's Sea," Liliana used the [Witch's Eye] to investigate the area in question. Relying on her flight magic, Erica and the girls were finally reunited with Godou.

He smiled to welcome Erica, Yuri and Liliana who had flown here.

"Really... To think you chased me down to a place like this. What a meddlesome bunch you are. I am busy with my playmate here, so kindly stay out of it."

With a cheerful smile, he asserted.

On the other hand, the playmate listening on the side seemed to be frowning bitterly.

"I don't care if you want to treat things as fun and games, but this is an important segment of my plans. If you're frivolously making a nuisance, scram and hurry home instead."

"What a surprise. Why so serious, Gascoigne? It's true I'm having fun, but I am serious too, you know? But rather than playing around, getting more serious would be interesting. Entertain me to the end and don't run off midway."

Godou responded to Gascoigne's demand as if making fun of him.

Under normal conditions, these words could not have come from his mouth. If the "King of Swords" Salvatore Doni were around to hear such words, he would most likely offer a hug with utmost delight.

Witnessing this scene, Erica and the girls began to whisper to one another.

"...Everyone, what do you think about Kusanagi Godou's condition?"

"...Clearly he is acting very weird. However, in terms of mental state there are no signs of instability, but it is not exactly a bipolar disorder either."

"...Yes. It actually feels quite natural."

"...Or rather, one could suppose this is his true nature that is normally repressed by reason and common sense, which has taken this opportunity to manifest itself, or something like that."

Yuri and Erica nodded in agreement with the conclusion following from Liliana's commentary.

No matter what, Kusanagi Godou's strange condition was real.

"Godou, why don't you play with us instead. I hope you can show a little restraint and not strike out at a foreign guest."

"You girls, what?"

"I'd suggest not. This man seems to be under the effects of Lancelot du Lac's curse."

Even though half-smiling, Godou reacted with surprise. On the other hand, Alec sternly warned them.

However, Erica displayed a glamorous smile towards the two kings in return, and casually declared:

"Oh my, despite appearances we did come here with great confidence, you know? Godou, even if it's you, don't underestimate me -- so that's the situation. Alec, I hope you can leave our lord for us to handle. If I were to impose on you any further, it would be most impertinent whether as a knight or a lady."

The two kings simultaneously displayed the same expression in response to her flowery words.

Godou and Alec's curiosities were piqued, causing them to smile.

"Good! Well then, I will leave matters in your hands!"

Plasma erupted from Alec's body. Looks like he is about to take flight as lightning.

Godou immediately raised his right arm in response, intending to counter with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. In that instant, Erica and Liliana each threw a knife using summoning magic.

Without any hesitation, the two of them aimed directly at Godou's heart.

"What!?"

Greatly surprised, Godou tried to dodge.

Were he Salvatore Doni, he would have evaded effortlessly. But Godou did not know any martial arts.

Even though he excelled at relying on natural reflexes, using a Devil King Campione's concentration and survival instincts to evade enemy attacks with forceful suppression, it was definitely not the flawless motion of a martial artist.

Jumping back to escape the knives thrown by the knights, Godou could no longer tend to other matters.

Hence the command issued to Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was delayed, providing what was to Alec more than enough time for preparation. Turning into a flash of lightning, the Black Prince instantly flew away.

"I never thought, you would attack me so suddenly..."

The knives thrown by Erica and Liliana were not fake trinkets or anything of that sort.

They were authentic knives made of iron and steel, which was why Godou immediately evaded them.

"What are you talking about? Without the intent to kill, how could it pose a threat otherwise? Besides, Godou can easily tank an attack of that level. It's very ordinary after all."

Completely unworried as a result, Erica explained without a care.

Liliana silently nodded in agreement. It seemed like Yuri was the only one who was worried out of her mind.

"Really... Even under Lancelot's curse, I am still unable to fly eh. So the fun with Gascoigne ends here."

Godou shrugged as he grumbled.

"Disrupting my rare opportunity for fun, what a bunch of girls who don't know their place! No other way, I shall have to educate you properly right here before starting a new game."

"Do you think we will accept such tyranny, Kusanagi Godou?"

Liliana frowned angrily as she spoke.

"It looks like in your current state, you are indulging your desires too much. It is a knight's duty to remonstrate a lord who has strayed from the correct path. For this, I, Liliana Kranjcar, shall have no choice but to draw my sword against you."

Declaring thus, the blue knight slowly opened her hand.

Her beloved sword Il Maestro had not been summoned yet. However, this stance expressed her determination to do so.

They had come here intending to liberate Godou from the strange curse. Erica and Liliana were both in battle attire. Red and black vertical stripes. Blue and black vertical stripes. These were their usual respective capes.

"Godou-san, please come to your senses. Even if it were truly as Prince Alec described, and you have been charmed by Sir Lancelot, only by overcoming it will you display the dignity of a king!"

Dressed in her miko outfit, Yuri also spoke out in reprimand.

Godou smiled wryly and tousled his hair. She really looked quite stern and awe-inspiring.

"If I really am a king, then I won't be concerned with such trivial stuff. All I want is to roam the land freely, taking steps as I please. If I meet some fool who rubs me the wrong way, having a little duel would be nice."

Neither arrogance nor madness.

He was natural and relaxed instead. A composed and unfettered impression that did not carry ferocity. Perhaps this was actually Kusanagi Godou's true nature -- Erica secretly thought this to herself.

Come to think of it, he had always been able to switch freely to using his power for battle.

A person who easily became friends and collaborators with members of organizations in various countries.

"This unhesitating Godou is truly a first sight. What a truly troublesome condition."

Erica grumbled as she felt impressed. Having borrowed the powers of people who were not present here, the preparations for lifting the god's curse were already complete. It was now up to the current team to take practical action. They must succeed at all costs .

Part 2

The Holy Grail had taken the form of Fake Minos.

The bull-headed giant god roared as it flew beside the white divine horse.

"URRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAALLAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!!"

This bellow unleashed magical power and authority.

Turning raging spirit into spell words, thunderous roars shook the sky as crashing waves rocked the land.

Appearing before the eyes of Fake Minos as well as Lancelot and Guinevere riding the flying divine horse was the little island surrounded by rocky reefs.

Populated with strangely shaped rocky protrusions, it was indeed a castle of strange rock.

"Alexandre-sama's labyrinth, even though it has definitely been weakened..."

"A fake god and a god-slayer, even if they possess the same authority they cannot be truly equal. Apparently it cannot be nullified completely."

Riding astride the white divine horse, Lancelot and Guinevere conversed quietly.

"Nevertheless, since this point has been reached, only breaking in by force remains. Let Fake Minos charge into the labyrinth as a vanguard. Even if the labyrinth cannot be destroyed, it will serve the purpose of opening a path."

Lancelot and Guinevere entered the Devil's Sea with the bull-headed god of the labyrinth as their guide.

Rather than riding the waves, they were advancing through the sky. Only ten-odd kilometers now separated them from "Avalon." However, this remaining distance was the most arduous part of the journey yet.

First of all, amorphous mist blocked their path several meters ahead.

In addition, blown by terrifying gales, they were almost deported from the Devil's Sea.

Before they noticed, their course had veered off and no progress had been made towards the island.

Seawater gushed up from the ocean like a geyser, almost striking down the divine horse Lancelot and Guinevere were riding. These were all part of the Black Prince's authority -- the labyrinth's magical power which prevented anyone from approaching the island.

Every time Fake Minos roared, the labyrinth's magic was weakened.

"This cannot be allowed to continue..."

Lancelot muttered.

"One shall simply enchant Fake Minos with Insane Rush, so that it can attempt to create a breach by force."

"Sir Knight, please reconsider before pursuing such a reckless course of action. If you go ahead, it could cause detrimental effects on the Holy Grail which is being used as a catalyst!"

Sitting on the saddle, Guinevere voiced her opinion with a worried expression.

Nevertheless, Lancelot was unfazed by her concerns. Hoping to advance further while Kusanagi Godou was buying time for them, it was time to conclude things decisively here.

"O Minos, offerest one thy assistance!"

The ferocious bull-headed god gave a great roar of " OOOAAANNN!" in response.

"Thou shalt become the pioneer to traverse this sea. Chargest forth for the sake of this Knight and the beloved child. Thou only needst to aim for the labyrinth's exit, and dashest forward with insanity!"

These words comprised the curse.

The one cursed would become violent and ferocious, going berserk to achieve the goal at any cost...!

The effects were instant. Fake Minos who had manifested in the form of a bull-headed humanoid, now transformed into a complete bull. Abandoning its human qualities, it had turned into a beast god.

"QUOAAAAAAAANNNNNNN!!"

Ferocious bull Minos rushed forward like a shooting star, flying with astounding speed.

But as the bull continued to charge, an additional crack opened up on its body every so often. This was because it was a self-destructive rampage.

In just a matter of a few dozen seconds.

Fake Minos had crossed the labyrinthine sea as it exploded into a shower of shattered fragments.

At the same time, the magical power hanging over the Devil's Sea -- Black Prince Alec's authority dissipated. Through desperate rampage and sacrifice, Fake Minos had finally breached the labyrinth.

"How is the Holy Grail, beloved child?"

"Basically fine. How fortunate...!"

The golden urn hovered in the sky where Fake Minos had exploded.

Guinevere reported after a cursory glance. Lancelot silently nodded in acknowledgement. The indestructible divine artifact could not possibly have been damaged so easily.

"Then Excalibur can continue to be used."

"Well, this is a weapon that was revived forcibly after all, it won't remain functional for long. It should not be used except at crucial moments."

The quiet conversation was carried out with the view of Tokyo Bay laid out before them.

The rocky island floated ahead in solitude. The bizarrely shaped rocks were very conspicuous, giving the island a very distinctive look. This was indeed Avalon, the final destination of these two here.

However, just as Lancelot took up the reins, ready to advance...

Magical power burst forth from the ocean directly beneath!

"This is an authority!? --Of Gascoigne's doing!"

"Sir Knight, look at the sea there!"

A black sphere with a radius of twenty or thirty meters was submerged in the sea.

The sphere was emitting an extraordinary power. It was an attractive pulse which sought to drag down into the sea the divine horse that the white war god and the Divine Ancestor were riding.

"Magical sphere of avarice! This is the authority of attraction and compression that Alexandre-sama usurped from the gigantic beast Behemoth! No good, we're being pulled into it!"

"Laying a door guard at the final location beforehand, what thorough planning!"

The attractive pulse released by the submerged sphere immobilized the knight flying in the sky.

Lancelot kicked at her beloved steed's belly, ordering it to gallop, but it could not run. The divine horse attempted to follow the knight's orders and was moving its legs with full force. Normally, it could kick the air as if kicking ground, galloping with great speed. But now, the divine horse's legs were only waving in the air fruitlessly.

Not just the divine horse, but neither Lancelot nor Guinevere could move a single finger either.

They were immobilized by Alec's authority of attracting targets and never releasing them.

Lancelot summoned magical power, trying to break free from the authority's restraints, but it did not work. The source of this attractive force, the sphere, actually moved very slowly. But its attractive power was terrifyingly great in inverse proportion to its slow mobility. Even the white war god could not struggle free.

"Gascoigne, to think he actually set up this thing in the labyrinth..."

The instant Lancelot smacked her lips as she realized the Black Prince's trap...

A black humanoid silhouette could be seen from the corner of her eye. The profile of a mature female with a pair of white wings on her back. From the waist down, the body was serpentine while there was apparently a fish tail where feet would normally be found.

A grotesque demoness was flying in approach. With that speed and agility in the air, it really was flying like the wind.

Lancelot could not see any part of her other than her back. This was undoubtedly the authority Alec had usurped from the goddess Melusine![10] In the very instant the war god's attentions were drawn to the new enemy...

"Hmm!?"

The restraining force suddenly disappeared, greatly surprising Lancelot.

The attractive pulse sucking them in had vanished all of a sudden. The divine horse which had been galloping at full force was sent lurching forward. This became an opening.

Light as the wind, the queen instantly drew near.

Aiming at the opening exposed by Lancelot and the divine horse, the queen flew in with her pure white wings, grabbed Guinevere in her arms and made her getaway!

"Sir Knight!?"

Looking like an abductee, the Divine Ancestor desperately reached out with her hand. But immediately, the attractive force from the black sphere resumed once again.

The knight and her beloved horse were once again imprisoned by the attractive force.

"You, to think your target was the beloved child!"

Lancelot gnashed her teeth and yelled as her body remained immobilized.

Other than the back view of the abductor flying into the distance, nothing more could be seen. That direction was towards the "island" they sought -- Avalon. Was it returning to the place where the Black Prince was waiting?

"Prepare for a full gallop!"

It was imperative to struggle free from this force of attraction using full power at maximum speed! Lancelot instantly decided.

"There is no way out except by using full speed to break free. One must escape from being locked in this cage!"

Lightning was summoned from thunderclouds above. Blue-white flashes of lightning continually burst forth, striking the knight and the divine horse. The rumbling of thunder persisted nonstop, shaking the sky and the sea.

"Once filled with this power, this Knight and horse shall take the form of a white meteor. Beloved child, please remain unharmed until then!"

Praying as the thunder and lightning struck directly. However, was this going to work? She asked herself frankly.

Using the dashing gallop here would probably produce the same outcome as the fight against Athena last time. Lancelot would deplete her divine power and enter a state of exhaustion, thus hindering the battle against Alec. Compared to the duel with Kusanagi Godou, she wanted to keep all other fighting to a minimum. But doing things this way was looking bad!?

--Fine! Doubting inner monologue was cast aside.

Instantly steeling her determination, Lancelot continued to prepare for the dashing gallop. Escaping from this situation would also mean the divine lance Excalibur could be used. In any case, this weapon must stay in her own hand!

Lancelot's beautiful face could not help but smile beneath that white helmet.

It was a smile trembling with delight in anticipation of the approaching duel and farewell.

Meanwhile, Alexandre Gascoigne...

Leaving the cursed Kusanagi Godou behind for his lovers to handle, Alec had turned into lightning and flew away.

Entering the Devil's Sea in this manner, Alec could instantaneously travel to the depths of the labyrinth as the master of the maze. In this particular instance, that was the Floating Island's location.

Having usurped the labyrinth authority from Minos eight years ago, he was fully accustomed to the ways of using it.

This was an authority of creation that could materialize a labyrinth as imagined.

Not only could it modify buildings above or underground, it could also convert locations into mysterious forests or mystifying fog which could not be exited once entered, with all sorts of variations, such as the Devil's Sea created this time. However, there was the restriction that this authority could not be reused until a month had elapsed after each use...

Nevertheless, Alec had not returned to the Devil's Sea.

The "island" and the labyrinth was a trap set to separate Lancelot from Guinevere.

The war god who was strong enough alone was now armed with Excalibur. Furthermore, Guinevere still held that particular trump card. Divide and conquer would be the proper strategy.

For this purpose, he had already chosen the stage beforehand near the Floating Island.

--During the Meiji period, for the purpose of guarding the imperial capital Tokyo, the Japanese military of old had constructed three island outposts in the sea offshore from Chiba's Cape Futtsu. These were Sea Fortress One, Two and Three.

Alec had chosen Sea Fortress Two.

This was an uninhabited island under the management of the Coast Guard where civilian entry was prohibited.

The lighthouse, still in use, was powered by solar batteries. Apparently, firefighting training was also conducted here sometimes. Given that the little island contained little more than ruins and debris, Alec could rampage here without any concerns.

Flying at lightning speed briefly, he could see the island beneath him.

Landing, he resumed human form and summoned the [Queen]. Other than the face concealing restriction, she was a convenient servant indeed, and quite a precious treasure in many ways.

He issued orders to her for capturing Guinevere. Within the Devil's Sea, he had already set up the Behemoth sphere beforehand

. This was in preparation for the moment when the labyrinth authority was dispelled.

Ten-odd minutes later, the [Queen] finally returned.

An otherworldly beauty above the waist, her lower torso was some kind of fish and snake hybrid, with wings on her back--

The grotesque female familiar laid down on the ground the girl she had been carrying in her arms, then spread her wings and took flight. Making an exit as if she was embarrassed about her appearance. Her face must have been seen while she was abducting Guinevere.

"Finally time for us to catch up on old times, Guinevere."

"Such a description is only appropriate for a reunion between lovers. Incongruent with your title of Prince, Your Highness still has no idea how to treat a lady."

Guinevere responded to Alec with a surly huff.

"To have been invited to this kind of place when the location of the 'King of the End' was finally within reach... And separating me from Sir Knight as well, what on earth do you want?"

"In truth, our relationship is not that lacking in intimacy. Do you know how many incidents you have caused as a result of your inability to let go of your obsession with your past master? I have grown tired of dealing with you."

Alec deliberately posed with familiarity.

However, the smile on the corner of his lips displayed merciless egoism.

"Amongst those who have lost their lives in the schemes of you and your fellow Divine Ancestors, many were my friends and subordinates. It's time for you to pay the debts you owe them... Ah yes, by the way, there's also that woman who worsened her health in order to seal away that Arthur you summoned."

The memories concerning their eight-year-long conflict were reawakened.

Had Guinevere simply been a witch who harassed Alec, even if annoyed, he would probably not be so intent on eliminating her. Similar to the way he tolerated that Princess...

"But there's no such rule saying that the Witch Queen does not have to pay her debts. I'm just doing a little stint as a debt collector . I'm sorry but would you please indulge this little willful wish of mine?"

"You revived Avalon for this..."

The antique doll-like beautiful face was viciously distorted as she glared at Alec.

"Not only did you find out Master's sleeping location before us, set a shameless trap in that place, and even separate Guinevere from Sir Knight, you had to impose such a self-righteous explanation! Alexandre-sama, you really are the worst!"

"Like you, I am in a scolding mood, but it's best that I don't act on it."

Alec dismissed the Divine Ancestor's accusation with a heavily sardonic smile.

"Now you must make a choice. Are you going to find a way to escape, avoiding risk even though the 'King of the End' lies before you? Or will you play your ultimate hand in a bid for everything? One or the other."

In the past, Guinevere would surely have picked the former.

And then waited for Lancelot's rescue. Since things had come to this, Alec could not let things go wrong in the last moment.

However, trapped in this current situation, what would she do?

Gamble with her remaining life to seek the "King of the End," or not? Which would it be?

Seeing Guinevere's cute figure beginning to expand, Alec smiled. Very well then, you made that choice. I shall entertain you to the very end.

The doll-like body of the beautiful girl was covered with silver-white scales as it expanded.

The black formal dress which resembled funeral attire was ripped apart in an instant.

Long and sharp claws grew out from the tips of her four limbs. Wings sprouted from her back. Her beautiful face had turned merciless and reptilian. But rather than ferocity, the face still carried a sense of solemn dignity--

This was the form of a dragon. Witch Queen Guinevere had finally used her trump card as a Divine Ancestor. Releasing the seal of dragons and snakes, she temporarily retrieved her former divinity as mother earth goddess.

However, the price was the forfeit of Guinevere's remaining life.

Sparks appeared all over Alec. Engaging divine speed, he prepared for a conclusion with his mortal enemy.

Part 3

"I am currently under Lancelot's curse. Before dueling with Lancelot, I need to fight Gascoigne first. Even though if this continues I'll be free once Gascoigne is defeated. But it looks like things won't go that smoothly."

On the deck of the magically operated sailing ship, Godou was speaking leisurely.

Naturally, he was talking to Erica, Liliana and Yuri before him.

"I want to fight that Lancelot as soon as possible to settle things. "

"If that is the case, Kusanagi Godou, you seem to have forgotten one important thing."

What? As Godou was taken aback by Liliana's statement, Erica explained to him:

"The spell words of the [Sword]. You still haven't obtained knowledge about Lancelot. You currently have no way to slice apart that war god."

"Ah yes. Now that you mentioned it, that's true."

Godou realized his carelessness. Apparently the curse had made him lose his cool.

"Well actually I thought that when push comes to shove, I could always have Guinevere tell me."

"Y-You! What are you thinking? She is an enemy, a Divine Ancestor as well!"

Hearing Godou's mutterings, Liliana reprimanded him.

"That is to say, you have no compunction against kissing that witch again! Anyway, how were you planning on getting her to follow your orders!?"

"Well, whatever, when the time comes I will always think of a way."

"Completely shameless! Spoken like a true sexual predator!"

"Don't say that. By the way, you don't actually dislike me acting this way, right?"

"--!?"

Godou wryly smiled at Liliana's fierce accusations as he winked at her.

The contents of her romance novels were still clear in his memory. The silver-haired knight had repeated the same lines as the heroine who wholeheartedly looked forward to being toyed with by a man resembling Kusanagi Godou.

Liliana averted her gaze with a frantic expression. Her anxiety clearly betrayed the fact that Godou was right on target.

"P-Please wait, Godou-san. Disregarding your statement about doing something to Guinevere-sama, the final mystery of Sir Lancelot still needs to be solved. Before fighting Sir Lancelot and the Black Prince, this must be resolved first!"

Taking silent Liliana's place, Yuri pleaded.

"Now is the not the time to fight. Please slow down and calm your heart!"

"Ah yes, actually. Lancelot without armor... I've seen that fellow's true face already."

Suppressing his belligerence for now, Godou smiled as he replied to the Hime-Miko.

This caused Yuri to blink repeatedly with a shocked expression.

"If Mariya also sees it, perhaps you can tell me what kind of existence Lancelot is? Perhaps the prototype can be used to unravel the final mystery. --Ah, right."

Struck by a great idea, Godou approached Yuri.

"P-Perhaps it really could work... Eh, Godou-san, what are you doing!?"

"Nothing much. I just came up with a great idea, so I want to try it straight away. Mariya can take this opportunity to instruct me about Lancelot as well."

"R-Right now right here!?"

Godou reached out and pulled the surprised Yuri to his side.

The frail and delicate Hime-Miko easily fell into his bosom. Godou could feel the touch of her slender yet extremely feminine body and the warmth of her skin.

Hugging her was such a pleasure. Godou smiled, causing Yuri to blush instantly.

"E-Erica-san and Liliana-san are both present. By the way, Godou-san, you're really not thinking straight. T-This must be a prank -- mmm..."

In contrast to the strong sense of propriety in her voice, Yuri's behavior did not express unwillingness.

She was neither resisting nor trying to escape, and her eyes even began to moisten passionately. Consequently, Godou did not hold back and pressed his lips upon hers to silence her.

"N-No, you cannot. E-Everyone is still watching. I-I cannot do this kind of act for Godou-san -- oooh, please do not do this."

With tears in her eyes, Yuri tried to move her lips away, but she did not truly refuse.

This was evidenced by the fact that she became obedient as soon as Godou again sealed her lips with his own.

Godou gently licked those cherry lips of hers that glimmered from the moisture of saliva. Recently, the Hime-Miko had started responding to him boldly but this time she was still rather stiff. Kissed by Godou, her lips remained tense for quite a while but gradually they opened.

As tongues clicked and lips were licked repeatedly, Yuri finally opened her mouth.

Her cute little tongue cautiously welcomed Godou's tongue as it extended into her mouth.

"B-Bad... Godou-san... P-Please could you understand, enough is enough. If you continue with this behavior, I-I will become angry for real -- oooh."

Her eyes narrowing from rapture, Yuri still kissed back despite turning bright red from head to toe due to embarrassment. But no sooner had Godou indulged in the long absent pleasure he missed than Erica walked over.

"Even though I noticed your lack of hesitation earlier, I never would have thought it extended to this area as well... How unexpected, Godou. You are full of surprises, one after another."

"Really? I'm just acting according to my own will, that's all."

Godou halted his kiss with the Hime-Miko to respond to Erica.

He did not miss the sight of Yuri's lips, trembling with reluctance at the interruption. Although it was likely subconscious, perhaps she really sought Godou after all.

"Sorry, since Mariya feels shy, could you two go somewhere a little further away? I want to learn about Lancelot here first."

Yuri began to shrink back from Erica and Liliana's gazes.

In order to attend to the Hime-Miko, Godou gave orders that went slightly counter to his own principles. He did not like giving special treatment to any particular person in his circle.

"Stop with the nonsense. How can I leave a person like you unattended so easily and make an exit?"

"In that case, you can join Mariya and teach me about Lancelot together."

"What did you say!?"

In a strange turn of events, Erica who was usually the one taking initiative, had been repeatedly surprised by Godou today. It was really quite an interesting spectacle.

"Yesterday, you learned from Mariya what she knew about Lancelot, right? If that's the case, there's no problem. Limiting my loving to one particular person... Really isn't behavior I want to condone. If Erica will join us, that would be for the best."

Having approached arm's reach, Godou grabbed Erica by the wrist.

In a contest of strength, Erica's magically enhanced physical abilities were superior. She should have been able to struggle free without trouble, but Godou easily pulled her next to him instead.

Since she would not hesitate towards an invitation from Godou, there was no need for foreplay.

Godou kissed Erica's lips with his own. This lasted dozens of seconds.

Yuri showed a mournful gaze while Liliana kept shouting " Please stop this, Kusanagi Godou. Erica, you too, should know enough is enough!" But Godou continued to kiss unfazed.

"Mmmm... Godou, don't think you can dodge the issue simply by doing something like this. Your command is too inconsiderate. I don't want to listen... Ooh."

Erica whispered lightly as she engaged in an intensely passionate kiss with Godou.

Boldly opening her lips, she covered Godou's lips with them. Using her passionately wriggling tongue she caressed Godou's tongue, sharing each other's saliva.

"Of course, facing such a proactive Godou truly makes me feel the intense beat of my heart. Since you have extended such an invitation, it makes me want to accept... As for doing that with Yuri together, I cannot agree so easily. I, Erica Blandelli, am not that kind of convenient woman... Mmm."

"Hasn't this been done with everyone before? Wouldn't it be nice to do it from time to time?"

Exchanging kisses a couple, no, several dozen times in this manner, Godou and Erica whispered softly to each other.

"Precedent is no excuse. I never said it was that easy."

"If you ever feel any discontent, you can always throw a knife at me like just now, you know? I won't evade it next time... And I won't even complain a single word. How about that, is that enough for me to be the partner of you girls?"

"Right, if such a chance arises, I really will do it. Prepare yourself!"

Making full use of the brief respite between their dialogue, the two kissed repeatedly without pause. Despite her words of displeasure, Erica's fragrantly sweet lips welcomed Godou with great passion.

"I really need you girls by my side after all. Especially Erica, you've pretty much been my companion the longest, always helping me."

"Come on... You only know how to sweet talk during times like these... What am I going to do with you?"

Erica finally withdrew her lips from Godou's mouth.

The hanging thread of saliva linking them together remained as evidence of their intense kissing.

"I can hardly approve of such emotional decision making. Without noticing it, you have somehow been provoked to become more and more unyielding. The fact that no man other than Kusanagi Godou has ever made me, Erica Blandelli, compromise this much, I hope you can thank fate properly."

"Ah yes. I will engrave it deeply in my heart."

"E-Erica-san, are you serious!?"

Yuri was shocked that the beautiful maiden of red had reached an agreement with Godou.

"Yes. Let this be a special exception only for today. The [Sword] is essential after all. Even though the method of carrying out the original plan has strayed, doing this with Godou was part of the plan after all."

"The plan... Y-Yes, that is true."

Yuri answered Erica whose face was flushed red.

It seemed like the girls were scheming something, but Godou did not mind. Just as he had stated, he would not complain even if he got stabbed. This level of willing acceptance was necessary as part of his determination.

"B-But. No matter what, this is too unbecoming!"

Liliana's shout made Godou smile at her in response.

"Even if you haven't said anything, you have to accompany us too. Didn't you mention before? So this time, you must accept me as a knight should."

"It is true I said it before, but this is too abrupt!"

Godou glanced diagonally at the troubled blue knight as he leaned closer to the Hime-Miko.

He pulled into his embrace Yuri who was scared stiff. Erica immediately came to his side as well.

"If Mariya really dislikes it, then let's stop here. However, I think no matter how I change, Mariya will still choose to stay by my side. So, may I?"

"D-Do not bring that up... Let me go -- Ah..."

"If you dislike it, then go ahead and bite my lips. No need to go easy on me, okay?"

Kissing Yuri again, he whispered to her.

Embraced in Godou's arms, the Hime-Miko twisted her body, but without expending much force. No matter how weak or frail her body, she could have refused more intensely as long as she was serious.

In this manner, Yuri remained in Godou's embrace, tears gathering in her eyes from ecstasy.

"O-Only if Liliana-san also agrees, you are allowed..."

"Trying to escape like that is a bit underhanded. I was relying on Mariya."

"T-Then Godou-san who is saying such things is the underhanded one. P-Promise me, please? Once Sir Lancelot's details are taught to you, you must return to normal."

"But that's not something within my power, so this promise is a bit challenging. If an opportunity arises, I will try my best."

"A-As expected, the current Godou-san is so underhanded -- Oooh mmm, mmm."

As Yuri finally relaxed and leaned her body against him, Godou tenderly kissed her.

Licking each other's lips, entangling their tongues, exchanging saliva with each other.

"Really... All sorts of plans and preparations have gone to waste , Godou, you're really hopeless!"

Erica embraced him from behind. Naturally, he also exchanged a deep kiss with her.

"T-This situation is truly a situation indeed! If Mariya Yuri and Erica are doing it, then as the Grand Chamberlain I should not display any lethargy."

Liliana made her way over unsteadily. Without saying a word, Godou pulled her to his side.

Part 4

"Speaking of Lancelot, he is the knight amongst knights. In the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, he was praised as the flawless and strongest existence."

As Liliana's beautiful fairy-like face leaned close, Godou unleashed a rain of kisses.

Lips covered lips, pecking away. Enveloping one another. Lips clamping down on another's lips. Tongues licked and brushed against lips. Attentively frolicking. As if seeking to recover lost time, it was a kiss full of deep passion.

"The crux of the matter is, what was the origin of the existence known as the knight? You must already know the answer to this, right?"

Half-baked magic and spirit powers were unable to affect Devil King Campiones.

But it was a completely different matter if spells were poured directly into the body. Namely, via oral intake.

With forthright temperament, Liliana was forcing her tongue inside. In response, Godou also extended his tongue into hers, stirring up and caressing the interior of her mouth.

The corners of their mouths soon became wet with saliva.

No, not just their lips but even the surrounding areas of their faces were made wet. Nevertheless, Liliana did not worry about appearances and leaned her face against Godou's cheek in an expression of intimate affection.

"Amongst those descended from the Scythians, the inheritors of Iron Age civilization from the original equestrian tribes, there is Sarmatia... The ones known as the innovators of the armaments and tactics used by heavy cavalry..."

Between rapturously accepting Godou's extended tongue, Liliana spoke during the brief interludes for catching her breath.

Erica decided to squeeze in at this time.

"Knights originated from Sarmatia -- or rather, the underlying soil of the Roman Empire that nurtured medieval chivalry literature to become knightly culture."

Erica stole their lord's lips from her longtime friend and rival.

Nevertheless, despite the inherent greed in Erica's kiss, it was rather tastefully done. Instead of letting herself be driven by lust and refusing to let go of his lips, Erica displayed the pride and dignity of a queen allowing a vassal to kiss her hand. Furthermore, it was accompanied by a young maiden's fervor.

As if trying to compete with this red knight, the blue knight once again offered Godou a kiss, in a manner as adorable as a fairy .

"The Roman Empire at that time, had a system where non-citizen soldiers were granted official Roman citizenship after twenty-five years of service... Voluntarily enlisting in the Roman military, Sarmatians were deployed all over the Empire as cavalry. "

"Yes. Retired soldiers were often granted land near the place they were stationed, and would marry local residents as wives."

The red and blue knights alternately approached with their kisses, in a competition to win credit.

Yuri watched with mournful eyes as the two knights tangled with Godou and said softly:

"Excuse me, Godou-san, so you have seen Lancelot's true face...? "

"Ah yes. That guy is actually a girl beneath the armor. Lancelot du Lac is a female knight."

Yuri sighed as she heard his immediate response.

With an expression like she wanted to say something, Liliana pinched Godou's back.

As for Erica, she moved her lips to feign a kiss and lightly bit Godou's lower lip.

"Ouch! What are you doing?"

"As it turns out, your lips were yet again stolen by female temptation."

"There should limits to how open you leave yourself. You must become more alert."

"Even though that kind of open-mindedness can be considered Godou-san's good point, nevertheless, it should be time for him to make progress and learn from past mistakes..."

Criticized by each girl in turn, Godou's head shrank back.

This was a tangent. His moment of honesty was for the sake of guiding the Hime-Miko's spirit vision. What was going to happen? Godou awaited the result. After all--

"Anyway, I was indeed able to see it thanks to what you said. Sir Lancelot's unobscured face stands as irrefutable evidence of her identity as a queen related to the Proto-Scythian lineages."

Yuri hugged back tightly in turn, and bringing her lips close as if trying to stand on her toes.

A resolute and proactive kiss. It was an act that no longer befitted the conservative Yamato Nadeshiko, thereby lighting her heart with a sense of immoral excitement.

Yuri's kiss was transmitting the knowledge for unraveling Lancelot's mystery.

Once again, the miko possessing the highest spirit vision aptitude had received a divine oracle. How befitting -- just as Godou was about to express his gratitude, the other girl who possessed spirit vision also offered a kiss.

"Herodotus was the historian who left behind the first and most ancient writings about the Scythians, faithfully recording every single detail about the descendants of this tribe. The key that links the queen and the female warrior, Sir Lancelot, to the Scythians, is.. ."

Liliana's spirit vision also succeeded on this occasion.

The rare girl, known as both a witch and a knight, transmitted new knowledge to Godou as well. A massive amount of information was being sent directly to his brain through [Instruction] magic.

The knowledge provided by the trio caused a sense of certainty to rise in Godou's heart.

Yes, it could be made. The [Sword] for slicing Lancelot apart could now be created!

Just as this confidence made Godou display a dauntless smile...

"Godou, come here for a bit, okay...?"

It was Erica pleading for a kiss. Naturally, Godou responded.

This was an act that had been repeated so many times he had already lost count. However, her kiss delivered neither speech nor knowledge.

"...A stone?"

Rolling over his tongue was a small and hard ball-shaped object .

Due to Erica mixing copious amounts of sweet and fragrant saliva along with the object, Godou unwarily swallowed it. Immediately, Godou felt intense chaos in his heart.

"W-What--?"

Anxiety, indecision, apprehension and the like. These hitherto forgotten emotions were reawakened once more.

What had been forced down his throat? Erica smiled gracefully as Godou puzzled.

"It's a shame and I'll miss this, but it's about time for things to conclude. Do you remember Hikari's disaster purification? We asked the Princess to cast a spell to seal that power into this enchanted stone."

Hikari was Yuri's little sister, the Mariya family's second daughter. She was also an apprentice Hime-Miko.

Disaster purification was a power that could cancel out a god's authority, even though the scale of its effect was limited. During the battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Hikari's disaster purification had managed to shatter the recovered Ruyi Staff which Erica had smashed earlier.

In addition, there was Alice's involvement this time.

"This isn't ordinary disaster purification, you know? This is disaster purification performed after the Princess had used psychic sensing to share her own spiritual essence with Hikari. Even though wiping out Sir Lancelot's curse is too difficult, it is possible to cause cracks in it... That's what the Princess said."

Really? So that explains the current feeling. Godou understood.

Indeed it was only on the level of making cracks. Godou had a feeling that if he let his emotions sweep him away, he would return to that state again.

However. Nevertheless.

Under the girls' gazes, Godou could not allow himself to reignite that fervor.

Because of Erica, who performed the reversal, trying to bring Godou back in spite of the lingering aftertaste from the earlier behavior which made her body and mind swelter.

Because of Yuri, whose eyes were in a daze from the repeated passionate kissing, yet she still displayed great worry on her face.

Because of Liliana, whose sincere gaze sought Godou even while she voiced all sorts of complaints.

It was imperative to return to their side--

The instant this thought crossed his mind, Kusanagi Godou naturally recovered his usual state.

Thus recovered, Godou now faced Erica, Yuri and Liliana.

The girls looked like they were still in an excited state due to the aftertaste from the earlier behavior. Their beautiful faces were more seductive than usual, and their alluring bodies brimmed with loveliness that tempted Godou.

Nevertheless, the three of them stared at Godou as if they had something to say.

Embarrassed, Godou deliberately coughed a couple times.

"Ah... Everyone, I'm really sorry about what happened this time . After Lancelot enchanted me with that suspicious curse, I seem to have become quite strange."

An apology straight from the heart. Nevertheless, the reception was less than ideal.

"I don't really agree. If I had to say it, Godou displayed exceptional vigor."

"Even though there is no actual evidence to prove this, I did not see you possessing the stupidity unique to those who were magically brainwashed, nor did you show any dulled reactions..."

"For some reason, I get the feeling that it was a curse that releases one's innermost thoughts and desires, amplifying them to near insane levels. In that case, up until just now, Godou-san was really..."

Erica's accusation, Liliana's resignation and Yuri's verdict.

Since he had brought things on himself, Godou could not object in any way. He timidly bowed his head.

"Looks like I troubled Hikari as well."

"That's right. She received the Princess' spiritual essence and used power which exceeded her limits, greatly exhausting her body and mind. She collapsed with a severely high fever. She even asked for you to visit her later."

Godou nodded at Erica's explanation.

Come to think of it, Hikari had requested "let's go out" quite a while ago. Other than apologizing for her troubles, he really had to fulfill his promise too...

"Of course, I also need to express my thanks to Alice-san. Did she come to Japan again? Is she together with Kaoru-san and Amakasu-san right now?"

"Uh... That is a rather difficult matter to explain."

Liliana answered Godou's question with a frantic expression. Yuri bowed her head with a blush and even Erica was diverting her gaze as if embarrassed.

What's going on? Just as he puzzled, Godou heard that voice.

"M-My apologies. I was actually hiding here all along, watching everything from beginning to end."

Unbelievably, it was the voice of Princess Alice.

Turning his head in a panic, Godou found the beauty standing awkwardly behind him.

"I hurried here because I learned from Erica's call yesterday that Kusanagi-sama was in a grave situation. Also, I was concerned with Alexandre's latest activities."

Apparently she had flown here using spirit body detachment again.

Of course, besides well intentions, morbid curiosity probably played a large part as well. But anyway, that did not really matter. Godou could not thank the Princess enough for coming here expressly to rescue him.

On the other hand, Godou was so shocked he could only stare silently at Alice.

Alice was also completely embarrassed, avoiding eye contact with everyone else. Furthermore, she was murmuring repeatedly in a highly excited tone.

"Find an opening to feed Kusanagi-sama via mouth-to-mouth the enchanted stone I had prepared. After hearing this plan Erica had proposed, I've been observing with a racing heart. I never knew things would get so out of hand! It almost scared me to death!"

Even though the embarrassment made her feel awkward, Alice's eyes glimmered brightly.

Godou and the girls' behavior must have given her quite an intense cultural shock.

"S-Sorry for going on a tangent. But to witness such an avant-garde display as befits Kusanagi-sama's faction, it renders me quite unable to describe things properly in words. R-Regardless, the problem of Guinevere-sama and Sir Lancelot is our first priority right now!"

Alice changed the subject forcibly, coughed cutely and began to look across the sea from the ship's deck.

"I can see a [Dragon]'s shadow over there. Most likely Guinevere-sama has released the seal of the snakes and dragons."

This was an observation made by the Miko-Hime. On the other hand, Godou could see nothing but the sea.

Yuri who possessed the same power as her, nodded in agreement.

"Yes. I see it too. Also, there is a presence of intense [Thunder] in that direction."

"Yes. That must be Sir Lancelot accumulating power."

Godou noticed it too, in the direction pointed out by the Hime-Miko, different from the one described by Alice.

From the Devil's Sea, the presence of thunder could be felt, which was apparently opposite to where the dragon's shadow was located.

"Guinevere and Lancelot were separated?"

"Yes. This must have been Alexandre's goal. To trap Sir Lancelot in the labyrinth, isolate Guinevere-sama, and then strike at each separately. Compared to the knight, the queen is easier to handle, which is why she became the prioritized target."

This plan had almost been foiled by Godou's intrusion.

That said, Godou could not possibly ally himself with a man of poor character like Alec. Well, it couldn't be helped. Thinking that, Godou shrugged.

On the other hand, Alice looked in the direction of where the dragon should be and spoke with determination:

"I will watch Guinevere-sama and Alexandre's duel. What are Kusanagi-sama's plans?"

"I will go to the Floating Island... Where Lancelot is."

From the Black Prince and White Princess' perspective, the Divine Ancestor was their greater enemy. However, that did not hold true for Kusanagi Godou.

The one he needed to fight and settle things with, was Lancelot du Lac.

Consequently, he needed to part with the Princess here.

"I really owe you one for the assistance this time. Thank you so much. I will properly express my gratitude later."

"Not at all, I am also having fun."

Alice responded to Godou's thanks with a mainly mischievous smile.

"Then I shall take my leave, Kusanagi-sama. May you be victorious. It's a shame that you and Alexandre cannot get along, but for the sake of world peace, it's best if you two can compromise a little. Then I can rest assured!"

This time speaking with ladylike tones, Alice flew away.

The four people, Godou, Erica, Yuri and Liliana were left behind. The usual team.

"Godou, it's finally time for our decisive battle against Sir Lancelot, right?"

"Uh yeah. Sorry everyone. The situation has gone messy because of me, but I've already decided from the start to end things with Lancelot. Could you all accommodate me for a little while longer?"

"Asking me, Erica Blandelli, this type of question is completely unnecessary. Only a fool will say to their right hand something ridiculous like 'accommodate me.' Well whatever, considering it's Godou, the fool at all times no matter what."

Godou smiled wryly in response to Erica's nonconformist answer, while Liliana and Yuri nodded on the side.

Even though things were a mess, the conclusion was finally approaching in spite of everything. Godou stepped forward at last, towards the duel with the knight who had caused the death of his mortal enemy Athena--

Chapter 7 - Journey's End

Part 1

Transformed into a white dragon, Guinevere was facing Alexandre Gascoigne.

The two had been engaged in a covert struggle all this time. Nevertheless, a direct confrontation never occurred because Guinevere always avoided such a situation. After all, it was impossible to face a Campione in a duel without turning into a dragon, an act equivalent to choosing "death."

Hence, this was the first and last battle.

Guinevere spread her white dragon wings and began to flap. However, this did not cause the dragon's massive body to take flight. Flapping her wings was for some other purpose rather than flying.

What the vibrating dragon wings produced was wind.

With a great noisy racket, a vortex of wind was forming around Guinevere's white dragon body.

The vortex immediately turned into a cyclone, as violent winds swept across the forty-thousand-square-meter artificial island. Alec was almost blown away.

"Sealing my movements in your territory?!"

'Correct! Alexandre-sama, Your Highness may possess the speed of lightning. Nevertheless, as long as you are immobilized, it poses no threat at all!'

The magical wind caused by the Divine Ancestor was not simply strong wind.

The cyclone even formed masses of air to strike at Alec with ferocity, trying to send him flying. Furthermore, there was a curse which wrapped around his tall, thin physique like a snake, sealing all movement.

Trapped within the confines of this magical wind, even a giant creature would probably be unable to move an inch.

It would not be an exaggeration to say his immobility was like being bound by metal restraints, for this was a type of bondage spell. The only one left untouched was the white dragon transformed from Guinevere, able to move freely while her opponent was left with no choice but to stand still.

Standing inside this cyclone that conferred an absolute advantage, the white dragon bellowed.

Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!

'Alexandre-sama, Your Highness should prepare yourself!'

Guinevere's adorable voice was heard from the white dragon's jaws simultaneously with the roar.

Next came the frontal attack. Swinging the dragon's massive front limbs, those sword-rivaling sharp claws were going to rip him apart. An ordinary person would probably be torn to pieces helplessly.

But Alec was a Campione, and thus possessed absolute resistance against magic. Even against the curse cast by a divine class sacred dragon--

"Be thou faithful unto death! And I will give thee a crown of life !"[11]

Chanting scripture, he raised the magical power residing in his body.

This in turn increased his magical resistance. Just as he finished raising his magical power, the wind's curse pressing on his body disappeared. Recovering his freedom, Alec instantly used god speed.

A bystander would probably think he teleported.

In an instant, Alec charged behind the white dragon and leaped lightly, touching the dragon's back with his hand. Of course, it was no mere touch. Turning his right hand into plasma, he released an electrical attack.

Zap! Sparks flew.

'Guh... Truly a nimble one!'

A sound came from the dragon as if Guinevere was smacking her lips. As befitted the gigantic dragon god which surpassed divine beasts, the electric shock did not seem to have done any damage.

Furthermore, the magical wind was increasing in momentum.

Guinevere once again poured divine power into the wind.

The wind roared, bellowed and moaned. This rampaging wind's purpose was entanglement in addition to blown attacks. Alec's slender body was once again constricted by the magical wind, unable to lift a single finger let alone make use of god speed.

"Tsk!"

Suddenly restrained tightly, Alec found his legs tied together.

He was caught in a difficult situation of falling over as he smacked his lips. Taking advantage of this, Guinevere swung the white dragon's massive tail with a swish. Being struck by that object would be no different from being pummeled by a steel beam from a building construction site.

Alec raised his magical power once again and managed to struggle free of the magical wind's curse. Activating god speed when the tail was mere centimeters from his body, he dodged. However, Guinevere infused the wind with divine power once more--

This was essentially an endless self-defeating cycle.

Using the instant when the wind restrained Alec, Guinevere used the dragon's body to attack.

Swinging those sharp claws on her front and back limbs. Biting down with those jaws, filled with rows of sharp and deadly teeth. Charging with that massive body as a weapon. Swiping with that unexpectedly troublesome weapon of a tail.

And more terrifying than any of those attacks, the breath from the dragon's mouth.

The dragon's breath instantly turned into a tempest mixed with shards of ice. This sharp onslaught displayed merciless ferocity, seeking to send the living flying, slicing them apart, freezing them.

Whenever any of these attacks approached, Alec struggled free from his bonds.

Using divine speed to jump backwards, he repeatedly evaded the dragon's attacks in the last second before being struck. Nevertheless, he could not counterattack in any effective way. Not due to Alec's manipulative personality, but because Alec's authorities were not very offense-oriented in nature.

"Oh well, the labyrinth creation authority was never one to be used for offense in the first place."

Alec muttered as he continued to endure the dragon's fierce attacks.

"Though talented, the bashful servant is unsuited for direct confrontations. The magical sphere of avarice is currently in use. And if I used that thunderstrike, I will lose the ability to escape from the palm of your hand. What a predicament!"

The authority of divine speed actually had an attack mode called [Black Thunder] which could incinerate everything on the ground.

However, using it meant that he could no longer use divine speed for half a day. Alec had no wish to use it in this situation.

"But anyway, Guinevere. There's not much time remaining before checkmate. Have you prepared a way to seal that move?"

Guinevere did not have the leisure to respond to Alec's question .

The ferocious dragon was using her gigantic body to fan the magical wind.

--This could be described as the battle between a lion and a cat. No matter how agile Alec was, suffering a single strike from the dragon would result in instant death. Hence for Guinevere, as long as she cautiously kept up her pursuit of her prey and delivered a decisive blow once sufficient damage had been caused, things were set.

That said, Alec was actually the one with effort to spare.

"Clearly you could have stalled for time while waiting for Lancelot's rescue, but you didn't. That means that knight must be suffering from some kind of inconvenience. For example, maybe something like insufficient stamina for continuous battle."

'Guh!'

Guinevere answered Alec's mutterings with a new wave of furious attacks.

Clearly she was feeling anxious. The hunch was correct. Furthermore, she must be aware that little time remained until the fulfillment of the conditions Alec needed to reverse his unfavorable situation.

He continued to evade the raging attacks of the white dragon -- until finally, the time had come.

Once Alec was certain enough power had been stored from Guinevere's attacks, he chanted the spell words.

"Hear me, daughters of the endless night, daughters of the earth and shadow!"

Even though the magical wind sealed his body's movements, Alec no longer cared.

In response to the chanted verse, three beautiful infernal goddesses manifested.

Standing guard above him and to his left and right were Megaera, Tisiphone and Alecto. These were the Erinyes, the three goddesses of vengeance.

"Fighting evil with evil, repaying crime with crime, shedding blood for blood, knocking out a tooth for a tooth, thus vengeance begins. By the blood of the slain mother, tragic death denies all future attempts at filial piety!"

Raven-black wings sprouted from their backs, while every strand of hair was a "snake."

Using their feathered wings, they completely deflected the razor claws, sharp teeth and deadly breath from Guinevere's dragon form.

"Megaera the demon, Tisiphone the avenger, Alecto the relentless, retrieve the curse and execute vengeance! Now is the time for revenge!"

This was the second authority Alec had usurped, the authority of vengeance.

Summoning the three infernal goddesses required spending a substantial amount of time on meditation and a ritual. Hence it was impossible to use in immediate battles. On the other hand, if the enemy could be lured where preparations had been made beforehand to summon the Erinyes, Alec would gain an astounding advantage.

Because all damage and destruction performed before them was reflected back to the perpetrator.

Responding to Alec's chant, vicious countenances appeared on the snake-haired Erinyes. Spreading their black wings, they attacked the white dragon.

The goddess in dragon form was tragically clobbered and sliced open--

Guinevere's entire body suffered the full force of the attacks she had unleashed on Alec earlier. Like living prey tossed high into the air to be shredded by the sharp beaks of gathering ferocious birds of prey.

A complete massacre.

Even though he had successfully sent his enemy to the grave, Alec was not moved the slightest. The problems of Lancelot and Kusanagi Godou still remained. As he thought of them, a familiar voice was heard.

"So things seem to have concluded."

"You came. What a keen sense of smell you have."

Turning his head back, he found Princess Alice's spirit body there.

Knowing she came to catch the show, Alec went "Hmph" at her and said:

"Just as you see, Guinevere has reached her end. Though Lancelot remains as an enemy... Perhaps there is no further need to fight him."

"Once the one he protected is gone, Sir Lancelot loses his original reason to fight."

Sharp as ever, Alice immediately concurred.

"Ah yes. Normally, this would constitute a motive for revenge, but that guy is a [Heretic God] after all. He has acted as Guinevere's knight for over a thousand years. If this lone constraint disappears, it would not be surprising for him to start wandering the earth."

This was precisely the reason why Alec targeted the Witch Queen first.

However, immediate objections were raised against his statement. It was the hoarse voice of Guinevere on the verge of death.

'No! Even though Sir Knight has indeed become a [Heretic God] , his loyalty towards our sworn master has never been lost! Now that the land of Avalon has appeared, he will not succumb to his heretical tendencies!'

She must be dying. The dragon's body had begun to petrify. The silver-white dragon scales covering her body were losing their luster and turning into milky-white stone.

'Guinevere believes in Sir Knight's heroism and devotion. He will surely take the place of us Divine Ancestors, going forth to serve under the banner of the "King of the End," pledging his allegiance as the premier knight!'

The Divine Ancestor's soul still appeared to be intact. Alec replied to her voice:

"If that island were the true Avalon, perhaps things might proceed in that fashion."

Neither merciless nor hateful, he simply responded without emotion.

As if mechanically pointing out errors in an experiment.

"The Heavenly Reverse Halberd is simply a divine artifact for building countries, and is affiliated with Izanagi and Izanami, the parents of Japan's islands. Their creations were not limited to intact land but also included the so-called 'Leech Child,' an amorphous fluidic object that was exiled to the ocean according to the myths."

Having severed Guinevere's tragic hopes, revenge was complete. As a result, Alec spoke coldly without emotion:

"The Heavenly Reverse Halberd happens to be the divine artifact that imitates this legend, allowing it to produce both dry land and Leech Children. Approximately a thousand years ago, the 'King of the End' had revived for the sake of exterminating the Campiones active at the time. Completing his mission as usual, he went to sleep on a certain island in Japan."

Through the experiment at Los Angeles, Alec understood the properties of the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. After associating it with the strongest [Steel], he came up with a certain hypothesis.

"The island where the 'King of the End' sleeps, was converted into a Leech Child using the Heavenly Reverse Halberd. You should have figured it out by now, that is the Floating Island I revived... The island you call Avalon. Here comes the mystery, who did it and why?"

Alice made an expression as if she realized something. She must have figured out the mechanism behind the trap.

"Apparently the masterminds are the elders who viewed the ' King of the End' as a threat. Turning the island where the troublesome tiger slept into a Leech Child, they sank it to the bottom of the sea to conceal it. And truly what a brilliant method of concealment. Nevertheless, there still remained existences like you Divine Ancestors. Since they were going to hide the island, the elders thought they might as well use an even more well-thought out method to be safe."

This was one of several possible developments that Alec had deduced.

"A week earlier, I tried using the Heavenly Reverse Halberd to reconstruct the Floating Island. What this verified was the absence of something that should exist. On that island there was no decrepit divine sword -- the remains of the 'King of the End.' After careful consideration, the elders must have changed the king's sleeping location beforehand."

In any case, there was no sword anywhere on the Floating Island. Consequently, the Heavenly Reverse Halberd was simply a red herring -- a diversion to trick seekers of the king.

Although Alec had a hunch about where the King of the End was truly located, there was no need to reveal it at this time.

"Ultimately, the Floating Island is not Avalon. Even so, it was sufficient for my purpose of baiting you. Hence I used the labyrinth authority to lock it up, to act as the crucial element of the trap."

'The divine sword's aura that could be sensed from the island -- could that actually be!?'

Without answering Guinevere's sobbing voice, Alec shrugged.

Sardinia's Lucretia Zola had once mentioned. The "King of the End" was much more ancient than Arthur and a hero spanning continents, both oriental and occidental.

Alec believed her statement and had been performing field research in various lands. What this achieved was the discovery of a decrepit Divine Sword of Salvation in Indonesia. This was the item he had ordered Cecilia Cheung to retrieve and bring over to Japan.

"Even though I was worrying how things would turn out when Kusanagi Godou appeared, in the end the plan continued smoothly without a hitch. Guinevere, this is the truth of the matter, which cannot be changed no matter what. As the Witch Queen, it is only fitting for you to pass away with dignity, is it not?"

'No! Even like this, Guinevere still has things to do!'

The white dragon's body had completely petrified. Turned into a milky-white statue, it was lying on the ground. However, this statue collapsed all of a sudden.

As if eroded by the long and merciless passage of time, it lost shape and became sand with a rustling sound.

The grains of sand, which had been part of a dragon god only moments earlier, scattered noisily across the ground. Carried by the blowing wind, a large clump of sand scattered and flew towards the sea.

"I can sense Guinevere-sama's consciousness in that clump of sand!"

"How resilient. As befits one who carries immortal divinity!"

Alec exclaimed in response to Alice's observation. What was Guinevere planning to do in that state?

Despite his curiosity, Alec turned himself into lightning. His destination was the Floating Island. By this time, Lancelot should have already landed. Alec wanted to find out what the knight would do after witnessing Guinevere's demise.

Part 2

That "island" Alec had caused to surface in Tokyo Bay was still several kilometers away.

Even so, Lancelot du Lac was stuck in midair, unable to advance. Imprisoned by the gravitational pulse emitted from the black sphere hidden in the sea, it was impossible to budge an inch.

Nevertheless, the dark clouds covering the sky above continued to release flashes of lightning.

The purpose of these electrical strikes was to replenish the essence of [Thunder] for the flying knight and divine horse.

"In order to reach the island of destiny which finally appeared, this Knight and steed shall go full speed at maximum power. This Knight's ally, turn into lightning together with one in a display of valor. Go forth!"

Recharging was complete for the secondary effects of lightning speed and meteoric impact.

Whispering to the beloved white horse softly, Lancelot leaned forward against the horse's back. In that instant, rider and partner became a white meteor. Turning themselves into a dragon-slaying snake-slaughtering divine sword, it was a charge which could tear apart heaven and earth. Now they needed no longer fear the gravitational pulse.

Focusing purely on flying, they broke free from the restraints of gravity, thereby traversing the Devil's Sea. From high up in the air, Lancelot looked down at the island of destiny she had finally reached. A little island which contained nothing but rock.

Covered entirely by conspicuous strangely shaped rocks, there were no other distinct landforms or structures.

Ordering the divine horse to circle the island from the air, Lancelot caught sight of something shiny on the ground below. It appeared to be metal reflecting sunlight.

Descending instantly, they landed on the peak of the strange rocks.

Embedded there was a rusted decrepit iron sword.

It was once a broad and mighty sword. Lancelot recognized it as one of many identical swords. Namely, the Divine Sword of Salvation which had been used as the material for the divine lance Excalibur.

The decrepit sword was the hero's remains. He was supposed to be sleeping in the land where this sword was embedded.

However, Lancelot could not sense from anywhere on this island the presence of his kin -- [Steel]. The warrior who should be lying in slumber with the decrepit divine sword. That lethargic presence, similar to a rusted sword blade, was nowhere to be felt.

"This place is not Avalon either... Is that the situation now?"

Then the white war god became aware.

The final death roars of the [Dragon] not far away. Unmistakable. Furthermore, the presence of the girl Lancelot was supposed to protect could no longer be felt.

It must be Guinevere who had been abducted by Alexandre Gascoigne.

Even in a battle against the Black Prince, Guinevere should have been able to seek protection by sending out her thoughts. Had she been able to escape successfully, she would have delivered thoughts to report her safety...

"Has the beloved child fallen before her grand aspirations could be realized? Looks like our journey is coming to an end."

Notions of resignation surfaced. What should she do from here onwards?

A duel with the Black Prince to avenge Guinevere? Or to finally indulge her long time wish, to begin a journey of wandering and battle -- No.

From atop the castle of strange rock, Lancelot could see the sailing ship approaching the island.

The "enemy" should be there. Questions along the likes of how she should survive henceforth, shall be considered after the battle's conclusion.

Due to the full powered charge at maximum speed just now, Lancelot and her beloved steed were exhausted. Nevertheless, now that the beloved child was gone, she was free to rampage without reservation.

Feeling the duel approaching, Lancelot smiled under her helmet and tightly gripped the reins once more.

The castle of strange rock that Amakasu had described.

The ship sailed smoothly and approached this island of conspicuous and strangely shaped rock. The labyrinth authority had already vanished. Fortunately, Guinevere had magically enchanted the ship to move in response to Kusanagi Godou's orders.

Not only Godou but Erica, Yuri and Liliana were all on the deck .

"Sir Lancelot is now approaching. Alone."

Liliana reported. With Ena absent, she was the one with the best eyesight.

Godou focused his eyes and was able to make out the figure of the white knight. Rather than flying like lightning as usual, Lancelot flew in a straight line no faster than a normal horse's trot.

Lancelot appeared in the usual full armor, with no skin exposed .

However, the knight seemed to be giving off an impression of exhaustion, and the divine horse's footsteps felt heavy and dulled.

"You look really tired?"

Godou asked out loud as he walked to the edge of the deck.

The three girls retreated to the back, as if trying not to disrupt his dialogue with a god. It was not yet their time to enter the stage.

"Hmm. In order to struggle free from the Black Prince's minion, one resorted to a galloping charge. Furthermore, the beloved child who had to face that man alone, turned into a dragon and was defeated. In the end, all this sacrifice achieved was reaching a fake Avalon."

Ordering her beloved horse to hover motionless in the air, Lancelot spoke in low spirits. Apparently, reaching the Floating Island was a trap.

Godou was horrified by what Alec had done.

He was not sure what kind of relations he would develop with that man in the future, but if that guy prepares for a fight it would be unavoidable. It felt like no amount of struggling could get out of those multi-layered traps, and falling into them meant " checkmate."

"Were this Knight a sage with a keen mind, perhaps Gascoigne's scheming could have been thwarted. But unfortunately, one is merely a warrior who only knows how to charge forward. Thus, this Knight failed the beloved child."

"Are you going to seek Gascoigne for revenge?"

"One considered it. Nevertheless, incredible as it may sound, one's heart did not get fired up at the prospects."

With a metallic scratching sound, Lancelot lifted the visor of her helmet. The white war god's beautiful face -- the unobscured face of a woman was revealed.

"Now that the fetters of the protector knight's duties have been lost, this Knight wonders. Henceforth, one only needs to journey as one desires, fighting only those enemies whom this Knight deems worthy."

With the helmet opened, Lancelot used a female voice.

"Gascoigne is indeed a formidable foe. And the beloved child's enemy as well. However, this deviates from one's preference. Hohoho, this Knight's true wish is to charge like an arrow that has been shot, swinging a lance ferociously. Were one not this foolishly straightforward, this Knight would not have gotten involved with that certain man."

Even though the girl under her protection had just been lost, the beautiful war god was smiling instead.

Once heroes suffered loss, they did not wallow in nostalgic attachment. This twisted sense of competitiveness, truly belonged to a [Heretic God].

Exactly the same as when Godou had befriended the war god Verethragna.

"So, what are your plans now?"

"No further words are necessary. There is no lack of familiarity between dear sir and this Knight. Surely dear sir's purpose is the same? In order to play the symphony of an intense duel, to mourn the goddess Athena!"

Lancelot smiled delightfully as she spoke.

She was already completely certain. Godou nodded silently.

"Naturally, this Knight would never be so rude as to challenge dear sir with an exhausted body! This Knight shall curse oneself, for the sake of vanquishing Kusanagi Godou, one shall risk all with this body!"

In the instant she called out, Lancelot's immense divine power was restored.

These were words of magic. The curse of [Insane Rush] which had been applied to Godou previously. In the same manner that it had replenished Godou's power after the battle against Alec, the white war god now used it to recover herself!

Then the familiar lance descended from the heavens.

This was the ultimate weapon that created the white star which had made Godou and Athena suffer so much. Gripping it tightly in her hand, Lancelot announced as if chanting:

"Come, Excalibur... The sacred lance born from the Divine Sword of Salvation! Now then, Kusanagi Godou, this Knight has already shown dear sir one's true face. In that case, there is no point in hiding the remainder!"

Lancelot's white armor flew apart.

That honey-colored hair was most suited to her cool and refreshing facial beauty.

Fully exposed was her tall and slender physique, with an astoundingly voluptuous bosom and exceptionally mesmerizing hips. As the body of a mature woman, it was completely flawless.

In addition, her attire changed.

Chain mail protected her upper torso. The helmet no longer had a visor to obscure her beautiful face. The divine lance Excalibur was wielded in her right hand, while an iron bow was strapped to her back. The saddle of the white divine horse now carried a quiver of arrows.

Furthermore, the armor which had been protecting Lancelot till now--

The white steel that flew apart now shattered and scattered noisily, turning into countless pieces. These pieces further fragmented, expanding and transforming as they scattered. Unbelievably, each fragment became a knight and horse combination.

The style of each knight's armor, was very similar to what Lancelot used to wear.

On the other hand, the color of their steel was a deep gray like an overcast sky. With the same majestic appearance of the white knight, they lined themselves up in a row.

Numbering roughly three hundred or so, the knights were all flying on their horses in midair, rapidly gathering around Lancelot . They were like a perfectly disciplined flock of birds.

When birds of prey gathered to hunt collectively, they most likely moved in such a fashion.

A squadron of heavy cavalry had appeared to guard the beautiful war deity.

"Hohoho, it has been so long since this Knight last commanded these subordinates. This Knight shall lead these soldiers into battle as their monarch, to fight as a simple warrior to settle the duel with dear sir. To decide the victor through ordinary battle!"

This was Lancelot du Lac's completed state.

He was still in an abnormal state last time -- Recalling Athena's warning, Godou was terrified.

In that case, he could not hold back any more.

"As the one who ought to be the knight amongst knights, why are you female!? The greatest clue to unraveling this mystery, lies in Greek mythology!"

Erica, Yuri and Liliana -- the knowledge they taught was being yelled out.

Godou activated Verethragna's final incarnation, the [Warrior], and summoned the sword of spell words.

"You are no ordinary [Steel]. As sword gods born as heroes of steel, all were male warriors who shared intimate symbiotic relationships with mother earth goddesses. Nevertheless, you exist within the realm of the heroes of steel as a female instead. An extremely rare existence with dual identities as both a goddess and a member of steel."

"Oh? You intend to direct that weapon at this Knight? The spell words for slicing gods apart!"

Lancelot smiled with relaxed composure. If she had been watching his battle against Athena, it was only natural for her to know about the [Sword]. Godou continued unfazed:

"Rare, but not nonexistent. One of them was Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons. Widely known in Greek mythology as the daughter of the war god Ares. The queen of the female warrior tribe! The prototype for the war god Lancelot is either her or a goddess corresponding to one of her sisters. Am I right!?"

Appearing in the sunny and clear sky above Godou's head were the spell words of the [Sword].

Tiny spheres flashing with golden brilliance. With dozens of them twinkling, they were reminiscent of the stars in the sky. Each sphere of light was a weapon for severing Lancelot's divinity.

"Hohoho. You have mentioned a nostalgic name!"

"The Amazons were a ferocious all-female equestrian tribe descending from the war god Ares and a naiad. Inhabiting the coastal areas of the Black Sea, they were ruled by two queens. One who administered internal rule while the other commanded in battle. Amongst them were queens, such as Hippolyta, who were also daughters of their ancestor Ares!"

The formation of shining swords of light was being arranged in the air above Godou's ship.

Immediately in front, the "Squadron of Dark Gray Knights" lay in wait, with Lancelot in the center of their formation. Every one of them were pointing their lance tips at the spell words of the [Sword].

Then a frontal conflict commenced--

"The reason why Hippolyta and her sisters are [Steel], originates from their father Ares. For he is a corner of the most primitive source -- the purest incarnation of the sword which fights in total compliance with its duty. Hence, he is violent and inconsiderate, a war god symbolized by a sword stabbed into the earth!"

Godou was stunned as he continued to compose the spell words
.

The squadron of knights, roughly three hundred of them, had deployed half their numbers as a vanguard and charged into the [Sword].

Was Lancelot really choosing her own defeat!?

"If the battle ends with dear sir as the only one swinging your weapon, it would be this Knight's dishonor as a warrior. So let one's subordinates raise some havoc!"

In spite of the situation, the beautiful war god was truly feeling joyous. Was there some kind of trick?

It was like sending birds of prey into a net. These shining golden spheres of light were the blades for slicing Lancelot apart. The dark gray knights should also be valid targets as well--

Godou puzzled as he continued chanting spell words. His first priority was to increase combat potential!

"The ancient historian Herodotus recorded in his narrative, *The Histories*, that the equestrian Scythians worshiped a divinity equivalent to Ares from Greek mythology and even treated him as a special deity. But unlike other gods for whom they built altars, the Scythians worshiped Ares through his symbol -- the sword stabbed into the earth!"

The golden sword easily slashed the dark gray knights to pieces .

The spell words' blades sliced helmets in half and pierced chain mail as the knights and their horses were noisily shattered into fragments as easily as glass sculptures.

The fragments disappeared in an instant. In the blink of an eye, the squadron of knights had its numbers thinned out by half.

Nevertheless, Godou did not feel a sense of victory. Instead, it was anything but reassuring.

"In addition, Herodotus also recorded this: intermarriage between the equestrian Scythians and the female warrior tribe gave rise to equestrian Sarmatia. This nation is precisely the key to how the Black Sea's goddess and queen of war took on the appearance of Lancelot the knight!"

"No truer words than that! This Knight was once worshiped by the people as the queen of war!"

Lancelot's forthright admission only served to bring bone-chilling terror. But Godou could not stop now.

Spreading out the [Sword] in a giant ring shape, Godou surrounded the remaining half of the knight squadron.

The knight squadron guarding the beautiful war god, was indeed akin to a dark gray flock of birds of prey. A golden net encircled them, preparing to down them in one fell swoop. At this moment, Lancelot also chanted spell words.

"A decree to the valorous knights. Falter not, fear not. For you are all knights, undaunted and unrelenting. You are only permitted to advance. Forward! Think nothing but charge forth to crush the enemy!"

Then she tossed the iron bow on her back to the sky.

This time, the bow shattered and scattered, its fragments forming dark gray knights. The newly born knights numbered roughly a hundred. The squadron of knights whose numbers had been halved, once again bolstered its ranks!

"Eh, are you actually...!?"

"Hohoho, as befits the one who is Knight's destiny, how observant! Have you discerned one's intentions?!"

Lancelot had revived the squadron of dark gray knights.

The knights made another charging attack at the encircling net weaved from the golden sword. Repeating the same scene as before, the knights were continually slain by the [Sword].

However, Godou trembled in fear once he figured out Lancelot's goal.

'King, this is another tactic used by immortal [Steel]!'

Godou nodded to acknowledge the warning given by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi residing in his right arm.

Lancelot's immortality did not simply manifest itself as the power to turn into mist. She also held the power to resurrect the minions who served her.

'Undaunted by your spell words, aiming for victory by openly contesting via frontal charge. Be they snapped or crushed, she polishes and sharpens these sword blades anew.'

Sounding extremely impressed, the partner's voice was filled with praise and admiration.

'How befitting of one who shares my origins of [Steel]! Granted, showing off little tricks for running away was never in a sword's nature!'

"I get the principle, but being unable to do anything but react passively is infuriating!"

Godou remarked with surprise and admiration. This apparently suicidal tactic, was one which would threaten Godou if repeated enough times, for the sharpness of the [Sword] would dull after each use.

If it turned into a battle of attrition, the sword would become useless sooner or later...!

"That Lancelot, is using the weapons and armor on her person as the materials to create those knights?"

'Hmm, indeed.'

"In that case, whether she uses up her armaments first, or my [Sword] vanishes first, isn't that the key to victory?"

While the conversation with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi occurred, the dark gray knight squadron's numbers were cut down by half again.

This time, Lancelot tossed her quiver into the distance. It contained two arrows or so, each fitted with an arrowhead of iron. Once again, these objects shattered and scattered, giving birth to a hundred new knights who regrouped with the squadron again. In Godou's past battles, there had been other gods who had countered the [Sword]--

But the way Lancelot achieved it through this foolishly straightforward and simple manner was something new.

"So, Kusanagi Godou. Are you enjoying this spectacular battle!? "

"Give me a break! As if anyone would enjoy this annoying battle of attrition!"

Contradicting his words, Godou's lips were smiling savagely.

Very well then. Since you are replenishing your knights over there, I will chant spell words to sustain the [Sword]'s power as much as possible!

"The Sauromatae were later known as the Sarmatians. They initiated a conflict with their kin, the Scythians, and obtained victory. Both the Scythians and the Sarmatians were equestrian tribes. However, the Sarmatian's heavy arms and sturdy iron armor allowed them to crush the lightly armed Scythians!"

"Hmm. Using even sturdier steel was the style of the Sarmatians , for it was the victory of their predecessors!"

Flying all over the sky, the [Sword] formed a golden net of encirclement.

Surrounded, the dark gray knights prepared for a defensive battle to the death.

This was the beginning of a foreseeable battle of attrition. Using the greaves and gauntlets from her arms and legs as materials, Lancelot created knights once again. In opposition, Godou also weaved more spell words together.

"The Sarmatians in the myths, were also a nation which inherited the customs of female warriors. It was said that the women of Sarmatia were well trained in martial arts, and prohibited from marriage unless they gained the experience of killing a man!"

Godou wished to strike at Lancelot herself while the [Sword] was still sharp.

With this intention, Godou controlled the spell words. However , the decimated squadron of dark gray knights continued to guard her with their lives, preventing Godou's [Sword] from reaching her .

Lancelot proceeded to toss away her helmet to replenish her knights.

"The kings and queens spoken of in the myths are equivalent to 'gods.' Your past identity as the queen of the Amazons, as either Hippolyta, Penthesilea, or Antiope... Was a goddess as Ares' daughter. Hence, you, as a goddess, must have inherited the female warrior customs of the Sarmatians!"

The [Sword]'s overwhelming advantage against the knights was gradually eroding.

The knights who were destroyed in the beginning simply by being struck by the golden spheres of light, were now offering continued resistance. Soon after, the situation evolved into a stalemate.

In a direct confrontation, the [Sword] and the knights were mutually annihilating.

This was because the [Sword] was becoming rather blunt. Lancelot began to smile with a chuckle.

Other than the divine lance in her hand, her only remaining armament was her chain mail. Immediately, the chain links constituting this piece of defensive gear also shattered and scattered in the surroundings.

The numerous chain links turned into dark gray knights as her final reinforcements.

"Go forth, knights of the wilderness! Become this Knight's second lance, to vanquish Kusanagi Godou!"

The queen issued her orders.

The gray knights arranged themselves in a spindle-shaped formation in the air. She must have judged the encircling net of the [Sword]'s spell words to be breachable at this juncture.

Godou's breathing quickened. Now was the decisive moment for victory.

Acting passive will lead to defeat. He must switch to offense instead!

"Due to becoming soldiers of the Roman Empire, the Sarmatians and their culture were spread all over Europe. During that time period, you must have been known as the goddess of [Steel], the queen of the Amazons!"

Chanting spell words, Godou transmitted his thoughts to the remaining portions of the [Sword].

Gather together. Do not fight while scattered in the sky like stars at night.

Concentrate in one location to create an organism. Yes, faced with the knights who serve Lancelot, fight them like a ferocious beast!

"It was during an age when the heavy cavalry culture of Sarmatian origin was transforming into medieval European chivalry. Nevertheless, Sarmatia fell into ruin and its culture changed. In stark contrast to the flourishing of the majestic 'knight' on the battlefield, the names and myths of the Amazonian queens gradually entered obscurity!"

Thousands of flashes of light gathered to create a golden outline .

This could be compared to the light of a galaxy. A shining nebula illuminating the darkness of space. Concentrating light together to become mighty power, to pave the road to victory--

"Before she knew it, the goddess as the Sarmatian queen of war was wrapped in heavy armor, becoming Lancelot the god of knights. Consequently, she carried a sense of insanity and savagery unsuited to a knight's nature... Nevertheless, she was still the ultimate knight closer to the primitive source than anyone else! "

Manifesting over Godou's head was a [Snake]-shaped nebula shining with golden brilliance.

The form of a massive and slender [Snake] composed of thousands or even tens of thousands of light spheres. The head portion was an inflated oval shape, which proceeded to split open as if opening its jaws.

For convenience in battle, Godou had ordered the [Sword] to take the form of a living organism.

In the likeness of a divine beast, as a symbol in tribute to the goddess who had passed away due to the involvement of Lancelot.

"Hohoho. Are you going to challenge the dragon-slaying and snake-slaughtering war god with such a formation, god-slayer!?"

Glancing at the golden [Snake], Lancelot laughed heartily.

Rather than a mocking laugh, there was an authentic sense of exhilaration. It was the sound of someone who enjoyed battle from the depths of their hearts.

"This mettle of yours in bringing such elegance to the battlefield , truly caters considerably to this Knight's liking. True to form, dear sir is precisely the great opponent one had always sought! You are the man of destiny to whom this Knight offers absolute adoration!"

Queen Lancelot raised the lance in her hand towards the sky.

"Since dear sir has entrusted your destiny to the shadow of Athena, this Knight shall reminisce the divine splendor of the master of old, to display the unyielding might of the man who once stood as the one bearing overwhelming strength!"

The lance tip shined with platinum brilliance. Excalibur was the name of its blade. This divine sword had been swung in the past for the sake of world salvation, by the hero who became the source of King Arthur's legend.

"O Divine Sword of Salvation, steel slices apart the planets! Lend power to this Knight!"

The platinum-colored star suddenly manifested behind Lancelot and the knight squadron.

Its size and brilliance made it seem like a second sun had descended upon the earth. The destructive power of this star, capable of firing blades, was no joking matter.

Godou found it difficult to breathe as he directly faced the brilliance of the burning white star.

His [Sword] could not defend against that divine sword. How could he escape this desperate plight--!?

Part 3

In the middle of the sky, the flying squadron of knights was facing off against the golden snake.

Arranged in a spindle formation, the remaining gray knights roughly numbered a hundred. In opposition to them was the forty or fifty-meter-long snake. The [Sword]'s spell words had concentrated together to take on the form of a snake.

Focusing her gaze on her subordinates' formation, Queen Lancelot lifted divine lance Excalibur.

The white star gradually approached the beautiful war god's back.

"Finally time for the ultimate weapon to be used, eh..."

Riding on the deck of the magically-operated sailing ship, Erica gasped.

Standing upright on the prow, Godou was controlling the [Snake] as he focused his gaze on Lancelot and the white star. Erica, Yuri and Liliana were all on standby in the back of the ship in case of any emergencies.

Come to think of it, Lancelot turned out to be unexpectedly adept in tactics...

Erica frowned. Lancelot had repeatedly employed a foolish suicidal tactic while cautiously cherishing the ultimate weapon. This was done in preparation for the opportune moment to crush Godou in one fell swoop using her subordinate knight squadron and Excalibur in concert. Evidently, she was no simple berserker.

Originally, her true talents should lie in charging without distraction at full speed and maximum strength.

However, at some point in time she had become a sage who could calmly analyze the battle situation while fighting at full power.

Godou most likely thought the same. He was savagely smiling as he focused his sharp gaze on Lancelot hovering in midair. In order not to lose against these odds stacked against him, he was burning with battle spirit.

If Erica and the girls failed to assist him in a time of need like now, their existence would be meaningless.

"For Godou to defend against Excalibur, he must switch from the [Warrior] to a different incarnation. But while Sir Lancelot's knight squadron continues to exist, the [Sword] should still be needed. So let us protect him with our power."

"That goes without saying. Is that not the reason why we are here?"

Liliana immediately responded to Erica's call. As expected of the longtime friend and rival.

If the squadron of dark gray knights were Lancelot's subjects, then the red and blue knights were Godou's sword and shield. Erica and Liliana summoned their magic swords at once.

The steel of the lion, Cuore di Leone, and the steel of the master musician, Il Maestro.

The former was a great sword of heavy construction, while the latter was a glaive consisting of a blade fitted on the tip of a long shaft.

"Divine Sword of Salvation... The steel whose remains Guinevere-sama had taken and reawakened--"

At this time, Yuri murmured as she looked up towards Lancelot and the divine lance.

"Erica-san and Liliana-san. I have seen the magical 'pathway' connecting Sir Lancelot to the divine lance. I think if it can be severed, Sir will no longer be able to use Excalibur."

"As expected. Did you see it through spirit vision?"

"However, it's unfortunate that we two cannot see that pathway ourselves. Anyway, without Yuri's spirit vision it can't be done with certainty..."

Liliana praised in admiration while Erica tried to come up with a plan.

Even though Yuri was a rare world-class user of spirit vision, she was no expert in weapons or magical combat. Those were the responsibilities of the knights themselves.

Nevertheless, the Japanese Hime-Miko tensed her beautiful face and spoke with determination:

"No problem. Please leave it all to me."

Come to think of it, there was a similar situation once. At that time, indeed--

Realizing something, Erica nodded at Yuri.

"I recall the Princess definitely said something about wanting to instruct you. So, Yuri, you have already..."

"Yes. It was during the journey to unravel the mystery of Sir Lancelot. Since I possessed the disposition towards learning this type of ability, I received instruction on it. Even though I am still a novice, I still believe I can be of help to everyone!"

Just as Yuri declared so, a transformation immediately occurred .

The Yamato Nadeshiko originally had black lustrous hair strongly tinted a shade of brown. Now on top of that, a layer of faint luster appeared, causing it to shine with flaxen-colored light. Furthermore, her pupils became the color of glass.

In addition, a sacred aura was emanating from Yuri.

The only miko who gave off the same presence was Princess Alice and no other. The White Princess' most prided ability of psychic sensing. In actual fact, users of psychic sensing were extremely rare, roughly with the same scarcity as Ena's divine possession. Nevertheless, it was a power that Yuri had once used before.

"I see. In order for her to use it without Verethragna's [Protection], the Princess instructed Mariya Yuri after discovering her disposition--!"

Liliana also realized the situation and nodded.

"Yes. Please extend your hand forward, Erica-san and Liliana-san. Unlike the Princess, I cannot do it without direct tactile contact."

Yuri held out her hands, holding Erica's right hand and Liliana's left.

Erica could feel her heart entering contact with another. It was the same feeling she had during the battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. The psychic connection with Yuri had begun.

Erica could feel a scorching sensation in the back of her eyes. Liliana should be feeling the same thing.

"Through this power of mine, I will entrust every image I saw to you two. Please make the most of it."

Murmuring, Yuri collapsed as if she were anemic.

This resulted from her use of an unaccustomed spirit power, as well as the burden of dividing her magical power into two and sending each half into Erica and Liliana's bodies respectively.

Erica felt the energy center beneath her navel brimming with magical power and gently caressed her abdomen.

"Ah yes. Please allow me to do that. You should rest properly now."

"T-The rest is up to you two. I wish you victory--"

Yuri answered weakly in response to Liliana's invocation.

"If we do not get fired up and put on a good show, we are unworthy as women. Erica."

"That goes without saying. We must fight for Yuri's part as well, Lily."

The red and blue knights nodded to each other. The decisive battle in the sky had already begun.

The knight squadron in spindle formation charged dauntlessly at the serpentine [Sword]. It was a legendary scene evocative of Ragnarok.

In any case, the monstrous snake of light was having a frontal battle with the squadron of knights in the air.

Flying across the sky in waves, hundreds of knights were laying siege to the giant body of the snake.

The snake of light rapidly ascended with speed incommensurate with its massive size, trying to create distance. Knights followed in hot pursuit, trying to pierce it with their lances . At this time, the snake of light whipped its long and slender body to strike at the approaching knights.

Their armor shattered instantly, their horses sent flying, these knights disappeared in such a manner.

However, the remaining knights stabbed their lances into the snake of light and then drew back immediately -- they were fighting with everything they had, and using guerrilla tactics to pin down the snake.

Furthermore, it was not merely a battle between subordinates. Lancelot herself finally sprang into action.

Pointing the tip of the divine lance at Kusanagi Godou standing on the prow, the queen soaring on her divine mount gave majestic orders for attack.

In that very instant, the white star hovering in the sky above began to flash with brilliance.

--It's coming! Just as Erica became certain, Liliana swiftly called out:

"There is no time left to defend! Help me take flight!"

A hasty order. Nevertheless, it was sufficient for her longtime friend Erica to understand.

She selected the appropriate spell words to assist the witchcraft Liliana was planning to use.

"O Artemis! I beseech you to bless one who is female with the power of wings!"

"Once again I offer my prayers! Please bestow upon us the privilege to fly across the sky!"

Liliana chanted the spell words and crouched down.

Striking her hand against the ship's deck, she activated her skilled flight magic. In the past, she only used to it to carry multiple people at once, but this time was different. Having received Yuri's magical power and Erica's assistance, she was able to produce much more powerful lift than usual--

What Guinevere had summoned, was this sailing ship which had been transporting Godou and his group.

Liliana's flight magic now levitated this ship. In the instant the entire ship was surrounded by blue light, the white star released a flash of lightning.

This was the hammer of god for incinerating all existence upon this ocean.

Just as the ship was inches away from being engulfed by this attack, it moved, relying on Liliana's flight magic. Surrounded by blue light, the sailing ship shot forward in a straight line, towards the Floating Island ahead. Furthermore, they barely managed to evade the lightning of annihilation.

On the other hand, this forced manner of transport half wrecked the ship.

The sailing ship now lay on the shore of the Floating Island -- or rather, the ship had crashed its prow, sending timber flying. Standing on the deck, Erica, Liliana and Godou lost balance from the intense rocking while the unconscious Yuri continued to lie motionless.

"Sorry for the sudden movement. I could not think of any other means to escape Excalibur's attack."

"What are you talking about? It's thanks to you that we're saved , thanks!"

Godou replied to Liliana's apology with smiling thanks.

Nevertheless, this was only an emergency maneuver. If they tried to evade in the same manner again, Lancelot would probably calmly destroy the ship using Excalibur.

"Godou, leave Excalibur for Lily and me to handle. You should focus your concentration on using the [Sword]. Your first priority is Sir Lancelot's squadron of knights."

Erica spoke without hesitation, assigning roles and duties in a clear-cut fashion. It was the same strategy that had been used against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven last time.

"But Lancelot is not that easy to handle! Are you sure you two can keep things under control?"

"Of course, it would be impossible for us to stop Sir Lancelot. However, if it's just Excalibur, I think we have a way. Yuri saw it just now with spirit vision. That weapon over there is very unstable."

In that case, it was enough.

Realizing Erica's intentions, Godou turned around towards the sea, focusing his gaze on the legendary battle in midair between the flying squad of knights and the great serpent of light. He intended to concentrate on controlling the [Sword].

Furthermore, a lone knight was flying towards the Floating Island. Wielding the divine lance Excalibur, it was Queen Lancelot in all her splendorous beauty.

Now was the exact time to release the trump card. Erica was first to begin chanting.

"And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them!"[12]

Smiting. These were the spell words for acquiring the Privilege of Extermination.

"They compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword"[13]

Red light surrounded Erica.

The chanting continued for the purpose of converting this luminance into the curse of sacred slaughter.

"Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates."[14]

Thanks to receiving Yuri's magical power, the technique was much easier to control in comparison to last time.

Erica infused the Privilege of Extermination into her beloved sword, Cuore di Leone. Furthermore, she manifested her defensive gear in the form of chain mail, a helmet and a large round shield.

The red exterminator had arrived. Naturally, Liliana was next.

"And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian!"[15]

Her silver-haired ponytail swayed as she chanted spell words.

"And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire!"[16]

What surrounded Liliana was blue light, obviously.

She must have secretly studied the spell laboriously. Executing the technique with much greater fluency than before, she poured power into the blue light. Naturally, Yuri's assistance also played a major role.

"And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses."[17]

Liliana used the Privilege of Extermination to alter Il Maestro's form.

The glaive with the long shaft was transformed into a silver longbow. In addition, her choice of defensive gear was much lighter than Erica's, consisting of blue gauntlets, greaves and a breastplate of light steel. This appeared to be battle attire geared towards Liliana's strengths in speed and agility.

"First, I will shoot down Excalibur with my arrow. Then Erica, sever the link between the divine sword and Sir Lancelot!"

Issuing orders, Liliana's pupils became the color of glass.

This must have been the result of receiving the images from spirit vision through Yuri's psychic sensing.

"Yes, if there are no exceptions amongst the gods, we can be fairly certain Sir Lancelot would be uninterested in us humans. Strike there with the sacred Privilege of Extermination -- !"

Nodding in response. Erica's own pupils were probably the same color.

For the sake of Yuri who had entrusted this power to them, victory must be seized.

Part 4

"Hohoho, the spell words for slaying gods... A rather excellent weapon it may be, nevertheless, it seems slightly inadequate before this Knight's weapon."

Finally breaching the defensive line held by the [Snake], she smiled as she offered praise--

Spurring the flying divine horse, Lancelot was approaching Godou's position. Rather than going at maximum speed like lightning, she was riding at a leisurely trot.

However, this act definitely did not carry arrogance or careless underestimation of the enemy.

The horse was an animal unable to sustain a full gallop for long periods of time. Judicious use of full speed was part of a rider's skill. Whether in the context of ancient cavalry battles or modern racehorses, this point has never changed. It was imperative to properly judge when to gallop at full speed.

Standing on the prow of the half-wrecked ship, Godou looked up at the formidable foe in the sky.

Having removed all steel from her body, the war god exhibited her original bare skin. She was currently dressed in sheer fabric no different from underwear or a swimsuit, most likely offering no protection.

Wielded in her right hand was the divine lance Excalibur. Its tip shone with platinum brilliance, guiding the white star.

The divine artifact known as the embodiment of destruction which could slice apart heaven, earth and the planets--

"If dear sir cannot pull out a weapon surpassing this, the battle is over. Truly what a shame it would be. Nevertheless, this Knight firmly believes such is not the case. Dear sir is surely the man who shall respond to one's hopes!"

"Yeah. It feels like such a hassle, but I will try as hard as I can."

Godou grumbled as he called out in his mind. Come quick!

"But you have overlooked something. Up until now, your defense was perfect because of the knight formation around you... But aren't you wide open now?"

"Oh... This Knight!?"

Immediately after Godou hollered, Lancelot became aware of the attack.

Glancing into the distance above her, she frowned. Riding her divine horse, she made a leap backwards.

Two seconds later, at the location the war god and her horse had been occupying, a great splendorous golden serpent -- Godou's [Sword] passed through. Rather than attacking the knight squadron, Godou had issued orders to snipe the leader.

Naturally, Godou did not expect this sort of ambush to defeat Lancelot directly.

It was only meant for containment. In addition, it was for buying himself time to move. Godou decisively jumped into the sea from the prow. If he fell straight down like this, he would have no choice but to swim.

But before Godou hit the water, the golden [Snake] swiftly flew down below him.

Godou barely managed to land on the head of the giant [Snake].

From the feeling beneath his feet, it was like landing on a hard and solid surface. Riding the [Snake] in this manner, Godou ascended. The [Sword]'s spell words could be used in such a way because of their ability to manifest as a real sword.

Having mounted the [Snake]'s head, Godou turned his gaze to the squadron of dark gray knights.

Maintaining a spindle formation, the knights moved like a flock of birds of prey. As expected, they were flying here to pursue the [Snake] which had disappeared from before them.

"Attack that fellow's back! Strike from behind!"

Godou gave orders to the [Snake].

The snake undulated its body in response. As the several-dozen-meter-long [Sword] began to rise rapidly, Godou lay down prone and hugged the [Snake]'s head tightly.

His entire body could feel that distinct touch of the [Sword] he had felt in his hand so many times before.

Compared to metal, it felt more similar to stone. Since it was not meant to carry passengers, he had to grip with all his might to avoid falling off.

The snake continued to fly at high speed, subjecting him to horrifying wind pressure.

Godou's head, shoulder, arms and back were being struck by masses of air as he endured the heavy pressure. Even so, he did not fall off, perhaps because the [Sword] protected him.

Regardless, the [Snake] moved according to Godou's orders.

The squadron of knights in spindle formation -- was the target as the snake flew rapidly to devour the remaining knights. In response, the knights forcibly switched directions in an effort to pierce the [Snake]'s tail with their lances.

In any case, both sides were trying to catch each other's tails.

On one side was the snake of light, and on the other, the spindle shaped squadron of knights. But from a distance, it looked like two flying serpents trying to swallow each other's tail, tracing out a ring shape in the air.

Godou glanced down below.

On the nearby sea surface, Lancelot was pointing her lance tip at him, targeting Kusanagi Godou as he rode the [Snake]'s head.

"Well, this is turning out to be endless repetition..."

At the moment, Godou and Lancelot's subordinates were entangled in mutual pursuit. If Lancelot used Excalibur to attack recklessly, her irreplaceable companions would likely be caught up in the attack--

But this type of worry most likely never crossed Lancelot's mind.

Because she was the knight able to use the mind's eye to see through divine speed.

Hence, Godou did not expect her to hesitate. On the other hand, he was expecting something else while he prepared a splendid finishing blow for Lancelot. If Erica and Liliana successfully find an opening, it should be possible--

"O Blade which destroys heaven, earth, and the stars. In place of your proper master, this Knight is your current wielder. Exhibit sacred annihilation and slaughter!"

As expected, Lancelot fearlessly chanted spell words. In order to strike a blow using Excalibur.

The white star released lightning which would probably destroy Godou and the [Snake] alone while avoiding the dark gray knights. However, if it was those two girls, definitely...!

"Manifesting justice in this world through these spell words of mine! Divine might indeed resides in my oratory incantation!"

Godou chanted the spell words in firm belief. Rather than defend against Excalibur's attack, he infused the snake-shaped [Sword] with the maximum amount of magical power, for the purpose of obliterating Lancelot's squadron of knights.

"O Sword, shine with brilliance for the sake of my victory and justice!"

"O Sword, manifesting the light of salvation, bring balance to this world!"

God-slayer and war god chanted and immediately, several completely different things happened at the same time.

First was Excalibur whose lance tip was thrust forwards, causing the star of the white sword to release lightning.

Next, a flashing arrow of blue light was shot from the sailing ship, splendidly striking the tip of the divine lance. This resulted in the divine lance tip's deflection by a few dozen centimeters.

Furthermore, Godou had infused the [Snake] with abundant magical power.

The snake of light instantly accelerated in pursuit of the squadron of dark gray knights, devouring them from behind, tearing apart the spindle formation.

Lightning came attacking from Excalibur, but its trajectory had been perturbed greatly.

The light which should have pierced Godou and the [Sword] like a thread through the head of a needle, the divine lighting of destruction passed over Godou's head in the distance instead.

Finally, surrounded in red light, the blonde knight flew in the air like a comet.

Swinging the magic sword of the lion, she sliced through empty space. This void was located right in between Lancelot du Lac and the divine lance Excalibur that she was wielding.

Erica should have simply sliced through air, but a cataclysmic change came over Excalibur.

The lance's shaft gave off platinum-colored sparks as it jumped out from Lancelot's hand as if rejecting her, falling into the sea below.

All thanks to Erica, Yuri and Liliana's full efforts, Godou was saved.

Since the [Snake] had greatly weakened after the devastating strike against the squadron of dark gray knights, Godou ordered it to return to the Floating Island. The sword blades had been reduced greatly, both in number and sharpness, so it was best to stop fighting in the air.

Godou once again landed on the shore of the Floating Island.

By this time, the [Snake]'s length was down to ten meters or so. Godou released the snake shape and allowed it to return to its original form of spheres. Thirty or forty spheres of light were shining as they hovered over Godou's head.

"It's called Excalibur, right? That lance doesn't seem like it can be used any further."

"Hmm. It was dear sir's subordinates' doing."

Spurring the white divine horse to fly in approach, Lancelot responded to Godou.

The divine lance with the platinum blade had disappeared from her hands. However, the war god and the warrior queen of equestrian tribes seemed to be smiling with joy.

"Indeed because of this, only the beloved horse remains by this Knight's side. Even as a horse, this is the premier vassal who overcame innumerable battlefields alongside this Knight, and no less worthy than those subordinates who serve dear sir."

"They're not subordinates. Those girls are my important companions."

"Hohoho, what a subtle manner of calling them. In that case, allow this Knight to correct oneself. This divine horse is one's irreplaceable dear friend. Even intimate as one's bond with dear sir may be, it cannot surpass that between Knight and steed. Now is the time for the final conclusion!"

A cavalry lance suddenly manifested in Lancelot's hand.

This was the weapon she had also used during the battle against Athena. She must have saved it expressly instead of turning it into knights. Yes, for the sake of delivering the final blow.

"Yeah, got it -- that's all I want to say. I've already seen how terrifying that thing can be. The attack that even Athena could not stop. It's finally time for me to experience it for myself!"

Saying that, Godou issued attacking orders to the [Sword].

The blades of spell words hovering over him began rushing towards Lancelot. There was no longer any steel protecting her body. Neither was there any squadron of dark gray knights for defense -- however.

"Do not sound so cold and distant. This Knight truly wishes for dear sir to endure against one's full powered charge at maximum speed. Given this mist of one's immortality... Even dear sir's [Sword] will be unable to slice through. Prepare yourself well."

Lancelot's figure disappeared as the Floating Island was covered by thick mist.

Visibility became so low that it was impossible to see a few meters ahead. However, Godou recalled the previous battle and focused his mind on finding Lancelot's presence... She's there, attack with the [Sword] immediately!

Nevertheless, there was no reaction and it seemed like nothing had been cut.

"Hoho, this mist is a blessing this Knight borrowed from one's great grandmother and water goddess. The spell words for cutting Lancelot du Lac will not work against it. There is nothing you can do but prepare for one's return!"

Her voice sounded as if she was smiling.

Godou understood. This was similar to the time when he had been unable to sever Medusa's divine power. Due to defense from a different deity's power, the [Sword] was rendered ineffective.

Lancelot did not make a further sound. She must be charging up for a full gallop.

"Well, I knew this was gonna happen."

Muttering to himself, Godou took a deep breath.

Last time, in order to resist Lancelot's Excalibur, Godou had relied on Athena to create the blade that could open up heaven and earth. Both sides had been using borrowed power.

In their next duel perhaps, that should not be repeated--

That was what Godou could not help but wish for. Neither Lancelot nor Kusanagi Godou were the type to enjoy a battle undertaken with borrowed power.

"As the one who holds all victory in my hands, I am the strongest... All enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished! "

Standing surrounded by the mist, Godou chanted the sacred verses of Verethragna to raise magical power.

With the [Sword] no longer needed, Godou decided to use a different power. That said, which incarnation should he use? In actual fact, Lancelot was not a perpetrator of sinful crimes or the like and therefore not a target of the [White Stallion] or the [Goat].

What could he use to strike down the lightning comet...

No other way. At a time like this, only that guy could be used after all.

Godou drew a certain image in his mind. Having done that, a certain incarnation could now be released at will. However, would that guy's power alone be enough to defeat Lancelot's galloping charge...?

As he pondered, Godou heard a soft voice saying "Let me participate as well."

Godou immediately nodded. If the enemy was going full speed at maximum power, he had to respond with full force in turn!

Then he waited. Seconds, minutes, or even dozens of minutes passed.

Even though the passage of time was unclear, the mist finally cleared up after a long wait.

However, the sky was not clear. Black thunderclouds filled the sky above. These had been summoned by Lancelot for the sake of gathering the essence of lightning.

"This Knight is Lancelot du Lac indeed. Commonly known as the Knight of the Lake. This Knight infuses this lance with all of one's authority and spirit, charge forth! Kusanagi Godou, dear sir shall gamble everything to stop this Knight!"

Carrying these fierce words, a white light began to shine amidst the thunderclouds.

Immediately, the knight flew out at lightning speed with meteoric destructive power.

Her skin clad only in sheer fabric, the beautiful war god Lancelot was charging with a cavalry lance--

And then, Godou unleashed Verethragna's fifth incarnation, the [Boar].

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

The one most capable of charging with astounding force and embodying tyranny itself, the incarnation of destruction.

The black [Boar] flew out from the sea like a torpedo, rushing towards Lancelot and the divine horse.

It was a frontal clash between the white meteor and the black gigantic beast.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!

The [Boar]'s ferocious howls reverberated across the ocean. Nevertheless, even if this intimidating creature was a sacred beast, it was merely a wild animal by itself. Facing against the lance-wielding war god, having a weapon was imperative.

Hence, Godou continued chanting spell words.

"It was here at this place, that Susanoo led a thousand unruly deities in rebellion."

These were the sacred verses of Susanoo. The song for summoning the partner residing in his right arm.

"A thousand swords standing upon the earth, used as city walls to defend against the enemies."

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was used to absorb Godou's authority, in order to produce a newly synthesized power.

Combining with Verethragna's [Goat] allowed the use of a railgun while adding the [Warrior] made it possible to damage a divine artifact. And this time was a combination with the [Boar], naturally.

'Here! Namely, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi! The steel that breaks a thousand blades!'

The divine sword Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi announced its name with a thunderous voice resounding throughout the vicinity.

The divine sword's power was applied towards the furry hide which covered the [Boar]'s musculature.

The shiny fur instantly changed in nature, producing a body forged from jet-black [Steel]. This was no longer fur but armor.

In addition, the two long tusks that protruded from the corners of the boar's mouth had been converted into sharpened blades.

Like lances for penetrating all existence. The amalgamation of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and the [Boar], was an incarnation of the divine sword in boar's form.

'Hahahahaha! War god Lancelot, as fellow [Steel] originating from the most primitive source, I announce my arrival! Try stopping these great swords of ours!'

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
!!!

Ama no Murakumo and the [Boar] seemed to be in exceptionally high spirits.

Like fish in water, they ascended rapidly like a torpedo shot from a submerged submarine, clashing intensely with the white meteor.

"Hoo... Most befitting of this Knight's destined one! Such power, such intensity, one can hardly bear it!"

Lancelot spoke softly, licking her lips.

Enveloped in white lightning, she and her beloved horse were descending swiftly towards the little island in Tokyo Bay. Halting their descent, was of course, the black metallic [Boar].

Using her beautiful right arm, Lancelot made a thrust with her cavalry lance. The [Boar] blocked the blade with its snout. Having been turned into steel, it was not sliced apart.

Equally matched, neither could gain the upper hand.

The war god in rapid descent from the sky, and the black metallic beast flying out from the sea to block her path.

The two's violent clash swung alternately in each other's favor. However--

The balance was slowly eroding. Gradually, the white master and subordinate were gaining ground.

The [Boar]'s position reached a peak and began to be pushed down as Lancelot and the divine horse advanced towards the ground.

The beautiful war deity did not seem to possess any flashy authorities and existed purely as an especially powerful charging knight. So it turned out even the [Boar] could not keep up with someone who specialized purely in this one attack.

"Hohohoho, Kusanagi Godou, please be patient a little while longer. This Knight shall be over by your side presently. Accept one's fervent passion when the time comes, and be annihilated! The time of destiny approaches!"

Convinced of her victory, Lancelot yelled out from the sky above.

Spoken with passionate tones like a confession of love. Nevertheless, there was no room for sweet romance to blossom between Godou and her. If the [Boar] were to be blown away, Kusanagi Godou would be wiped off the face of the earth...!

Godou infused all his magical power into the black gigantic beast.

Not good enough. Power should have been increased, but it was not sufficient to reverse Lancelot's descent. This level of power was nowhere enough.

What about a surprise attack? The [Boar] had two tusks growing out of its mouth like spears. Without warning, one of them was shot out as a long range weapon to send Lancelot flying. It's going to hit -- that was what it seemed like.

However, Lancelot and the divine horse managed to dodge the sharp tusk's surprise attack. Against a user of the mind's eye who could even discern divine speed, it was too reckless even as a surprise attack. It would be bad if the situation remained unchanged...!

Godou watched with anxious eyes as the battle between black and white continued in the air.

"Lancelot currently holds the advantage... However, there still seems to be some leeway for a reversal. Kusanagi Godou, if you really wish for it at all costs, it's not like I can't offer you some help ? Even someone like me feels that it is not a bad idea to have a Campione owe me a favor."

A calm voice was suddenly heard during the intense battle.

A quick glance found Alexandre Gascoigne to be standing somewhere close without Godou noticing earlier. He must have flown here as lightning after eliminating Guinevere.

"I refuse. If I owe you a favor, who knows what kind of price I'll have to pay in the future? If I took that kind of gamble, it would be utter stupidity."

Responding coldly, Godou again focused his gaze at the meteor in the sky.

Concealing his anxiety, he glared sharply at the descent of the goddess and the divine horse. Right. In front of this man -- the only man other than Salvatore Doni who had been able to provoke a sense of hostility from Kusanagi Godou, he could not allow himself to be embarrassed by a shameful battle.

This inexplicably intense emotion made Godou burn with great intensity of will.

Lancelot must be defeated, in order to avenge Athena. But what else could be done now!?

--Yes. Even in this situation, an effective weapon remained. Ironically, it was Alec's appearance which reminded him of it.

Godou suppressed the impulse to curse out loud and yelled at the partner in the air.

"Ama no Murakumo, the horse! Use Gascoigne's thingy!"

The divine sword also possessed the ability to emulate enemy powers.

In the earlier battle against Alec, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had emulated "divine speed" at Godou's behest.

Lancelot would likely defend successfully again if a normal attack was used. However, if Black Prince Alec's divine speed was used to execute an attack, perhaps -- !

In response to Godou's orders, the [Boar], assimilated with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, fired off its tusk.

There were two tusks growing out of the corners of the [Boar]'s mouth. One had been fired as a weapon just now but was defended against. Lancelot's divine horse was again approached by a projectile fired at close range, this time the remaining tusk.

"Hmm -- !?"

The beautiful war god's face turned pale. If the surprise attack had been aimed at Lancelot directly, she probably would have evaded it using the mind's eye. However, her beloved horse did not possess such a skill. It was too late for the rider to give directions for evasion.

Flying with divine speed, the massive tusk struck the white divine horse squarely. Or rather, the white divine horse was sent flying.

The tusk of steel continued flying towards the distant ends of the sky.

Swept away by this attack, the divine horse disappeared as well . Furthermore, having lost her mount, Lancelot's white descent was nullified, and at that moment the black metallic boar came charging--

"OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!"

The enormous divine beast crashed straight into Lancelot.

Even the war god was sent flying high into the air as screams reverberated all around.

The black [Boar] fell back into the sea, tracing out a parabolic trajectory. The impact created a massive pillar of water, rising almost to the clouds.

Furthermore, Lancelot's body fell down onto the shore of the Floating Island.

Godou and Alec immediately approached her. Even fallen upon solid rock, the war deity's gorgeous figure did not lose its form, and continued to display absolute beauty.

Nevertheless, this did not mean she was unharmed.

Lancelot lay on the ground in that manner, smiling at the god-slayer who had brought her death -- Kusanagi Godou. Courageously, she said:

"Ho, hohohoho. Truly a wonderful battle. One cannot thank you enough, god-slayer. Whether Athena or dear sir, both responded splendidly to this Knight's millennium-long thirst for battle. Ah yes, Gascoigne, even though it would be nice to fight you after Kusanagi Godou, it looks like such a wish cannot be realized. This must be fate."

These were Lancelot's final words.

In the next instant, her body turned into stone and immediately crumbled.

Thus vanished a [Heretic God] who had manifested over a thousand five hundred years ago. Were Lancelot the war god to manifest upon the earth again, it would most likely be a male knight completely different from her. Such was the change her myths had undergone.

Such a formidable foe, but she will never be encountered again.

Thinking that, Godou could feel a sense akin to loneliness overflowing in his chest.

Epilogue

Part 1

It was after the deadly battle and Lancelot du Lac had passed away.

On the shore of the conspicuous Floating Island, covered with rocks, Kusanagi Godou and Alexandre Gascoigne stood facing each other.

"Looks like the curse was lifted."

"Pretty much."

Answering Alec's question without paying attention, Godou began to ponder.

On this occasion, he had made trouble for this guy. The guy was a rather problematic character, and their temperaments felt strangely incompatible; nevertheless, Kusanagi Godou's behavior was definitely in the wrong...

Playing dumb and not apologizing was a possible option.

But Godou was not shameless enough to pursue such a course of action. Instead, he apologized properly.

"I've really troubled you this time. You told me so clearly to act cautiously and not take rash action, but I added to your woes instead... How should I say it, I'm really sorry."

Godou bowed his head deeply. Seeing that, the Black Prince smiled with a toothy sneer.

Was he surprised by Godou's honest apology? Prior to smiling, he had shown a perplexed expression.

Even though he loved to put on airs, it was very possible that he was quite a shy person underneath. However--

"Don't be concerned. As I've said, this is all within expectations. I am not suffering any negative emotions such as anger or the like. But once again, I have confirmed it, you are truly a Campione."

His words struck Godou exactly where it hurt.

"When encountering other Devil Kings, I have met many similar incidents in the past. I'm used to this kind of trouble, so you have nothing in particular worth apologizing for."

"I see. But Gascoigne, I don't consider myself as lacking in common sense as those guys."

Deliberately trying to maintain calmness in his voice, Godou spoke up.

"Why are you lumping me together indiscriminately with those unruly existences?"

"No, after calmly observing, I've discovered reasons to group you in the same category. There's no problem at all. Kusanagi Godou, you should start considering the problem rationally."

"Consider rationally... Then you're in the same category too."

Replying, Godou somehow felt extremely annoyed by this pretentious man before him.

These words brought instant effect. Alec frowned as he tried to suppress his anger.

"Wait a minute, I cannot tolerate such a statement. Let me make a correction."

"No, Gascoigne. Indeed, other Campiones frequently rampage around without consideration. Unlike them, you plan strategically and set the stage beforehand. To be honest, the style might be different -- but then, there's not much difference in outcome between you and those others who rampage. In any case, you are all enemies of world peace."

"Shut up. You're the one who hides behind hypocrisy while causing chaos in the world!"

What on earth was this feeling?

While he carried out this fruitless conversation with Alec, Godou realized with heartfelt intensity.

There was a faint sense that they were poking at each other's vulnerabilities, exposing ugly truths each was unwilling to face. Even though their personalities were completely different, the two of them acted out according to instinct--

Their conversation was terminated by the sudden feeling of massive magical power in motion.

Godou and Alec cautiously turned to face the same direction. This Floating Island was covered with solid black rocks everywhere they could see. Located in the center of the island was a protrusion of rock like a small hill. That was precisely the direction.

"Alexandre, Kusanagi-sama, we have a situation!"

Princess Alice was literally flying in the sky. Using the advantage of a spirit body, she hovered lightly in midair. Pointing at the hill of rock, she said:

"Guinevere-sama has invoked upon herself a revival spell, and her body has recovered!"

The instant he heard the report, Alec transformed into lightning and flew over.

Godou on the other hand, was carried by Alice's flight magic. Arriving at the peak of the hill of rock in this manner, they found a decrepit iron sword speckled with rust was being thrust.

The sword being thrust towards Alec, was a set of remains known as the Divine Sword of Salvation.

A young beauty was wielding the rusted steel. That beautiful face, resembling an antique doll's, was clouded intensely by a dark shadow heralding her death.

Even so, or rather, because of this, she was muttering as if in a trance:

"O Master -- please watch. Guinevere is about to use the last of her strength. Sir Knight too, has exhausted his duties as a [Heretic God], perishing upon the battlefield. We have exhausted all ammunition, our weapons broken. Hence, we are left with no recourse other than Your Highness' mercy!"

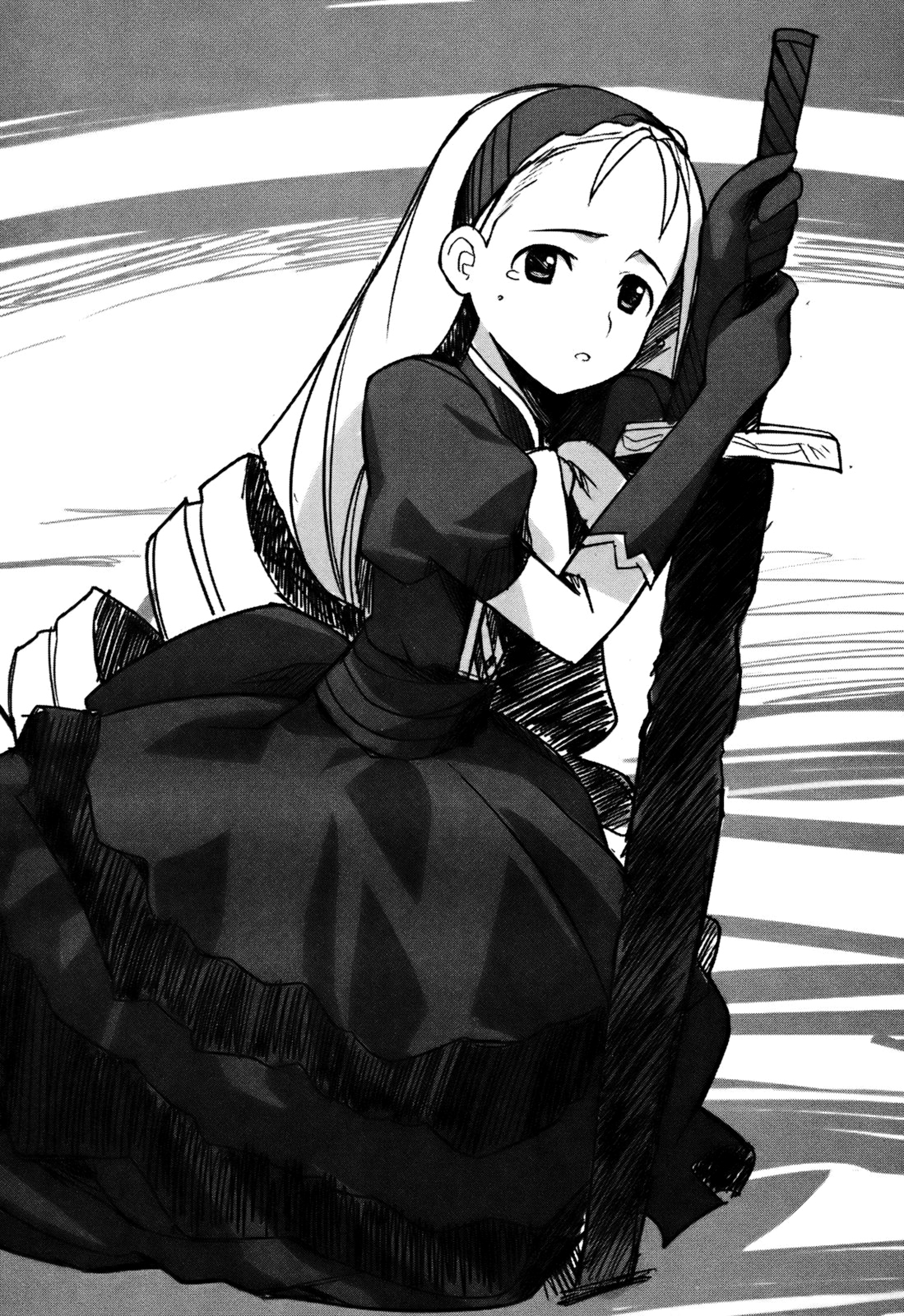
Naturally, this was Guinevere.

Dead once already, turned into sandy debris, she had apparently used magic to revive herself. But now, her pubescent body was crumbling into sand, like the final moments before a sand sculpture's collapse.

"I beseech you, please descend before Guinevere. Before my life ends, I beg you. At least, even if it is only seeing your divine visage , or hearing your voice, it would be fine -- !"

Using the decrepit sword for support, the Divine Ancestor prayed. All this time, the sand grains continued to collapse.

Guinevere gradually dimmed and lost color, turning transparent. Immediately after that, she disappeared. Even revival magic, which had the power to extend a dying patient's life, could only sustain the spellcaster's life for a very limited period of time.



Thus, Alec, Alice and Godou, the three of them gazed at the Divine Ancestor's passing.

Guinevere desired neither revenge nor battle, but instead wanted to spend her final moments speaking to the "King of the End" she had sought all this time. Consequently, she did not even give her enemy a single glance.

From that sense of despair it was readily apparent she was aware of the futility of her wishful act.

"......"

Alec's lips moved slightly, but Godou could not catch what he was muttering.

Immediately, a strong gust of sea breeze blew. Completely collapsed into grains of sand, Guinevere's body was scattered across the sky and the sea as it rode the wind.

Retrieving the decrepit divine sword, Alec walked down the hill of rock.

Godou tried to ask him what he was muttering about.

"Nothing much. 'Even if you embrace that thing and cry, all will be in vain so you might as well save the effort' -- was what I was thinking, but I didn't say it aloud."

"Alexandre, I never knew you could actually show some tact on occasion."

Offering praise in response to Alec's confession was Alice who had known him for so long.

"How touching! You're always saying insensitive things to hurt girls' feelings. Now that was acting like a gentleman for once!"

"Please refrain from making comments that make me sound like a person with sensitivity problems."

Alec responded to the Princess' praise with a face of suffering.

"But isn't it so mean to say all will be in vain? Even Divine Ancestors have feelings. Perhaps the crying pleas of a past companion might actually summon sympathies?"

Godou tried to defend Guinevere.

Just very slightly, but Godou felt sympathetic to Guinevere. It was true that she was a dangerous witch but she did have her own tragic wish, sacrificing everything she had for the sake of the master she had loved since her previous incarnation. It should not be wrong to view things this way.

"Perhaps. If the 'King of the End' also recognizes Guinevere as his own companion."

"What?"

"While immersed in researching the connections between King Arthur and the Holy Grail, I discovered a number of trails left behind by the 'King of the End.' I began to wonder, why would those Divine Ancestors fail to find them? That said, I do consider myself more skilled in unraveling mysteries than Guinevere."

Alec shrugged at this point.

"Nevertheless, the Divine Ancestors have immense amounts of time and magic on their side, as well as knowledge beyond humans. Which is why they should logically have an edge. However, in the search for the 'King of the End,' they have lagged behind us humans instead. The Witch of Sardinia, Lucretia Zola, also discerned that the 'King of the End' transcended oriental-occidental continental boundaries... Or rather, it would be better to say that he is closer to an oriental god, and Lucretia has already grasped clues to a certain extent."

Hearing a familiar name in this unexpected context, Godou was surprised.

"There's also this hypothesis. The 'King of the End' does not actually wish to be revived. It's as if he was sleeping somewhere and deliberately ignoring the Divine Ancestors' search, preventing them from obtaining clues."

"Plausible indeed."

Alice murmured, half-convinced. Godou thought the same. A [Heretic God] who did not wish to be revived?

"In fact, the reason why I brought the remains of the divine sword to Japan here, was based on considerations of that possibility. Even if the location was correct, if the one she sought didn't wish to be found, Guinevere was still doomed to failure."

"Location was correct? What do you mean?"

Godou questioned Alec's offhand comment. This caused Alec, who was walking in front, to turn his head back and answer in a matter-of-fact tone of voice:

"Regardless, the location where the 'King of the End' sleeps definitely gives rise to legends about warriors and divine swords. Even though this Floating Island is a trap, it is impossible to believe the legends are false. Because they are born due to the ' King of the End.' In that case, one would naturally think there was an authentic Floating Island somewhere in Tokyo Bay."

Engaged in these conversations, the two Devil Kings and the Princess reached the foot of the hill of rock.

Receiving them were Kusanagi Godou's companions.

"From your appearance, looks like you haven't been injured much, Godou."

"Safety is more important than anything."

Erica's cheerful words came first while Yuri smiled as she supported herself on Erica's shoulder.

"What's wrong, Mariya? Did you actually get hurt somewhere?"

"No, just a little tired. Please do not be worried."

The Hime-Miko's face continued to smile as she spoke. Godou felt concerned because she could not stand up by herself.

Godou gave Erica a quick glance. The blonde girl seemed to saying "She really is okay" as she laughed to herself. Looks like Mariya really was fine and not trying to act brave.

As Godou felt reassured, Liliana gave him a subtle smile.

"Congratulations, Kusanagi Godou. You have finally realized your long time wish."

Godou was bewildered at the congratulations. Then the silver-haired knight said:

"Have you not noticed? Even though you messed up in all sorts of ways, no part of Japan was destroyed this time."

"...Ah yeah, now that you mentioned it!"

Godou got it. He had always wished to cause as little trouble to the world as possible. When fighting gods and Campiones, the surroundings always suffered tragic destruction and even severe incidents of widespread petrification on occasion.

Perhaps they were so fortunate this time because the battlefield was in the center of Tokyo Bay.

What a cause for celebration -- just as Godou was about to leap with joy, he felt like he had forgotten something.

"What's the matter, Kusanagi-sama?"

"Ah, nothing really. It just feels like I forgot something..."

Just as Godou replied to Alice's puzzlement.

A flash of yellow light approached, flying across the sky. It must be flight magic. Clearly a witch other than Alice and Liliana. Could it be a Divine Ancestor?

As Godou signaled through his eyes, Erica and Liliana nodded in response.

The yellow light landed before the knights on alert. Appearing before them was a glasses-wearing oriental girl. Even though her face was cute, she gave off a rather unfashionable impression.

"Alec, what on earth could you be thinking to use that kind of monster...?"

The girl's first words interrogated the Black Prince with nagging tones. Apparently she was Alec's friend.

"What's the matter, Cecilia?"

"Stop playing dumb. It happened almost ten minutes ago. I, along with Daoist priests in Chinatown, sensed an object with great magical power moving underwater near this island. After investigating using the technique of ghost sight, we discovered a massive gigantic boar monster. Its entire body is wrapped in black steel..."

Godou was shocked by Cecilia's report.

"Even though the boar's body is covered with wounds, it continues to swim in the sea. Furthermore, it is advancing towards Yokohama and looking very excited. At the current rate, it will land at Yokohama in twenty minutes or so to destroy the city. What is going on...?"

"What makes you think it is my doing?"

"No one but you can command that kind of monster. It is a simple fact."

"Stop with the nonsense. Besides me, there is another person here who is a candidate as the monster's owner. And in this particular instance, he is not simply the candidate but the actual proper owner."

Alec protested and turned his sardonic gaze towards Godou. Actually, other than Cecilia, everyone's gazes had turned to Godou .

Erica went "Well, what an oversight" and shrugged her shoulders.

Yuri was saying "W-What should we do!?" in shock.

As for Liliana, she went "As expected, you really are quite difficult to manage" and closed her eyes.

"Well, true to form as always, Kusanagi-sama. The future sure feels exciting!"

For some reason, Alice was the only one who offered praise as if expressing approval.

"Let me guess, something happened in the following manner?"

Erica began to deduce with an air of superiority.

"Even though you needed the [Boar] in the duel against Sir Lancelot, there are no massive objects nearby you could target. So Godou began thinking about things on the shore, to use as a target for destruction in order to summon the [Boar]. Then the charge began on a trajectory in a collision course with Sir Lancelot..."

"Well, I was thinking that guy would not have much strength left to go anywhere after a direct confrontation against Lancelot..."

Godou's face began to twitch. The [Boar] and the divine sword's partnership turned out to be unexpectedly solid.

"S-So Godou-san, where is the target!?"

"Yokohama... Bay Bridge, because I heard Gascoigne had gone to the Chinatown over there, I couldn't help but think of that place. .."

"Wait a minute, don't blame things on me just like that!"

"A-Anyway, we must contact the Committee's Sayanomiya Kaoru as quickly as possible to warn them. A-At least there are cellphone antennas here... Damn it, no good. It is not connecting!"

Godou replied to Yuri's question, Alec grumbled while Liliana frantically tried to make a call from this remote island far out at sea . The third witch, Cecilia, muttered "Please seal off the Bay Bridge" as she departed using flight magic.

"Results show that people do not change their ways so easily. As long as Godou is involved, extraordinary things will happen."

Erica exclaimed emphatically, unsympathetic to the surrounding commotion.

Furthermore, there was still another person who did things as she pleased. Princess Alice.

"By the way, it is rare that Alexandre's aura of misfortune did not activate this time."

"What aura of misfortune?"

"Whenever he eagerly makes his plans, he easily stumbles over obstacles due to disputes with women. Unable to understand women's emotions, obsessions, unconditional love or anything of that sort, he is left with no choice but to improvise and adjust his plans. But this time, it did not happen... Somehow, it feels less amusing."

Black Prince Alec clicked his tongue in response to Erica and Alice's exchange, while Godou did not care.

In any case, the adventure involving Divine Ancestor Guinevere and the war god Lancelot had finally reached a conclusion.

Part 2

'Queen Oto Tachibana-Hime, jumped into the sea with sword embosomed. Sea currents carried her sword to a location of neither land nor sea, whence a floating island subsequently appeared.'

Even though the Heavenly Reverse Halberd was a red herring, if this legend turned out to be true--

This vague thought crossed the mind of Guinevere's dying consciousness. Her body had already turned into sand and collapsed, carried by the wind and scattered over Tokyo Bay.

Life had reached its end, slipping away, in preparation for the next rebirth.

However, some time still remained. As Guinevere drifted over land she had vague thoughts about matters related to the "King of the End." Having been through this generation and the previous, both incarnations had sought the master but had yet to succeed. To one's surprise, a tragic end?

Just as her heart was filled with lamentation, spirit vision arrived.

Due to being in a near death state, spirit senses had probably attained maximum clarity.

I see it. The master is sleeping at a place with neither land nor sea. Indeed the location could be seen.

"Alas... It turns out to be there! O Master, king who manifests at the end of eras! The one called Artos and predecessor of Arthur!"

Guinevere's cries should have been transmitted by now.

Transmitted to the true Floating Island, the location of the hero she had been seeking all along. Mother earth goddesses who had their lives extracted by his alter ego the divine sword, were transformed into Divine Ancestors. In other words, Guinevere and the rest of the Divine Ancestors were his "sisters" or "daughters" in days past.

Surely, their intimate bond will carry these cries over to him. Nevertheless, there was no response.

Ignored -- a new sense of despair eroded Guinevere's heart. However, this despair turned into a dark impulse, giving the dying Witch Queen final strength.

Even though ignored, even though unwanted. The master must be awakened no matter what!

"Alter ego of my mother, the Holy Grail and the sacred fountain of life. I entrust everything to you from here on. Awaken the sleeping master, for you must make him descend and appear once more!"

The Divine Ancestor was about to die, and would one day be reborn. However, the next rebirth required centuries.

Guinevere's next life was far away in the future. But in her stead -- she entrusted her overflowing feelings of longing to the Magic Holy Grail, instructing it through prayers to lay low in her stronghold of Brittany.

Fortunately, the vessel was still filled with the goddess' essence it had absorbed not too long ago.

If several centuries were to pass, the essence would probably metamorphose into a new Divine Ancestor and undergo rebirth. However, there were already seven god-slayers in this world. In order to defeat them and revive the apathetic master for another coming, a Divine Ancestor's power was far too inadequate.

"Hence, O Holy Grail, everything is entrusted to you... Ah yes, you shall become the new queen."

Guinevere used her last remnants of magical power to perform a summoning spell.

This manifested a circular disc, made of an alloy of gold and iron. Patterns reminiscent of [Swords] were carved on its surface, numbering two... No, three now. As soon as it was summoned, the count had incremented.

"Sir Knight... Lancelot du Lac's steel is now stored here. That's right, instead of becoming Kusanagi-sama's authority, be the arrow for the returning 'King of the End'... Please go forth."

Hearing Guinevere's command, the circular disc flew towards the ends of the sky.

Thus a conclusion was reached. The Witch Queen's consciousness gradually rarefied and disappeared.

"O Master... O King of the End... Guinevere and Your Highness--"

Her final words were interrupted before she could finish.

Soon after Guinevere vanished.

In her stronghold, a forest in Brittany, two objects appeared.

One was a disc of gold and iron. The other was a golden urn -- the vessel known as the Holy Grail.

This was the lakeside where the forest's owner and her guardian knight had conversed in the past. More time passed after the two divine artifacts manifested.

Slowly, the Holy Grail transformed. What had been an urn made of gold till now, was gradually undergoing change, acquiring supple flesh like a human's, taking on human form.

"Yes, to rouse the lethargic hero who sleepeth yonder... That is one's mission indeed--"

Viewed as a human, she appeared to be twelve or thirteen years of age, like a pubescent girl.

Her short hair was silver as if infused with moonlight. Her pupils were pitch black like condensed darkness. The exquisite beauty of her face seemed child-like yet sacred, and furthermore, emanated a queen's solemnity. Her entire naked body was filled with power no human girl could ever possess.

"Even though one hath been tasked with this mission, how should one proceed? Other than that man, within this goddess' heart -- there also seemeth to be a different man, one whom this goddess must defeat."

Slightly distorting her lips, she bore a smile.

Just by closing her eyes, she could picture the face of the mortal enemy carved clearly beneath her eyelids. The black-haired youth with black irises. But surely, he was no ordinary man.

He should possess the ability to make her blood boil with excitement. Without any grounds, the goddess firmly believed this fact.

"No matter. One still needeth repose for now. In the near future, this goddess shall begin her journey, to exhibit the queen's valor and ferocity to heaven and earth. Now let this newborn body rest fitfully..."

The young girl, born from the grail, murmured as she sank into the lake.

In order to cleanse her body and frolic in the lake water--

Meanwhile, back to Bousou again.

In the sky far above the ocean which had twice become the stage for intense battles. Even higher than the clouds. Further than the atmosphere. The celestial realm -- or rather, it is a place humans would call a satellite orbit.

A little island lay there floating.

From the perspective of the ground surface, it appeared motionless all year round -- what is known as a geostationary orbit . Humans were unaware of its existence. Even if they knew, they would simply dismiss it as floating matter in a satellite orbit.

In the center of this cramped plot of land, an iron sword was embedded.

A mighty sword whose blade measured roughly 100cm in length. The heavy double-edged blade was rather thick, resembling a woodcutter's chopper in structure. However, it was now worn out and corroded, only covered by rust.

Divine Sword of Salvation--

The personal sword of the Devil King-exterminating hero, the strongest [Steel].

Afterword

The Campione series has finally reached the milestone of a double-digit volume count.

In the supplementary booklet "SDMP" that is bundled with the October issue of Jump Square sold on September 3, there is even a preview of the upcoming manga adaptation.

These are all thanks to the loving support of the readers. For this I express my deepest gratitude to all readers.

Furthermore, this volume has taken the challenge of a cherished NETA in the industry. The one who inspired me was Rodotosu(□) -sensei, thank you very much (laugh). Everyone who is going " What?" because they started reading from the afterword, please continue reading from the start.

So, this time our protagonist and that certain problematic character have finally appeared on stage together.

If one were to write about their similarities from an author's standpoint, ignoring protests from the perspectives of the characters in question, the ridiculousness of their personalities and behavior should be even clearer to understand. After all, since each of the two firmly believes he (and only he) is serious and proper, so naturally those kinds of ridiculous descriptions became fewer...

If the page limit allowed it, I would also like to ask that person about the keyword "Arthur" appearing in this volume and the previous.

"The legends of King Arthur's origins used Celtic myths as an entry point. But that is just a perspective that disproportionately magnifies one tiny facet of the truth. If that man's prototype is to be demystified, one must transcend the limitations of the hero Arthur, and turn one's attention towards history... Or rather, the formation process of legends or 'pseudohistory.'"

This is just an opening line of sorts, with much more rambling to follow (wry laugh).

If one day a foreign drama titled "Alec's Adventure Series IV Chapter 12, The Mystery of Fake King Arthur" is realized, perhaps everyone can listen to his brilliant opinions.

When that time comes, all sorts of "Da Vinci Code" conspiracies related to the twelfth century English royal family and French nobles, and even the troubadours of the Knights Templar will be disclosed.

Finally, the next volume's story should be titled something like " The Story Continued" or "Second Tale." If possible, let us meet again in Volume 11.

Takedzuki Jou, June 2011

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Min Nan**(閩): a family of Chinese languages spoken in Taiwan and parts of mainland China such as southern Fujian , eastern Guangdong, Hainan, and southern Zhejiang.[1]
2. ↑ **Nüwa**(女): a goddess in ancient Chinese mythology best known for creating mankind and repairing the wall of heaven.[2]
3. ↑ **Leech Child**(蛭): pronounced "Hiruko," the original name of Ebisu(), the Japanese god of fishermen, luck, and workingmen, as well as the guardian of the health of small children. He was born without bones and the first child of Izanagi and Izanami.[3]
4. ↑ **South Seas**(南): the Chinese name for the geographical region south of China, particularly Southeast Asia. The term came into common usage in self-reference to the large ethnic Chinese migrant population in Southeast Asia, to be more precise, in Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam.[4]
5. ↑ **Walpurgisnacht**: "Walpurgis Night," a traditional spring festival on 30 April or 1 May in large parts of Central and Northern Europe.[5]
6. ↑ **Devil's Sea**(魔): also known as the "Pacific Bermuda Triangle," a region of the Pacific around Miyake Island 100km south of Tokyo and said to be a danger zone according to Japanese maps.[6]
7. ↑ **Chuugoku**(中): not to be confused with China (which is written with the same kanji), Chuugoku (meaning "middle country") refers to the westernmost region of Honshu, the largest island of Japan.[7]

8. ↑ **Locked room mystery**: a sub-genre of detective fiction where a crime is committed under seemingly impossible conditions.[8]
9. ↑ **4LDK**: a system of apartment labeling in Japan, 4LDK means 4 bedrooms + living room + dining room + kitchen.
10. ↑ **Melusine**: a feminine spirit of fresh waters in sacred springs and rivers from European folklore. Commonly depicted as a woman with a lower torso of a snake or a fish (like a mermaid), sometimes with wings.[9]
11. ↑ Revelation 2:10
12. ↑ Joshua 6:13
13. ↑ Joshua 6:15-16,21
14. ↑ Joshua 6:26
15. ↑ Numbers 31:7-8
16. ↑ Numbers 31:9-10
17. ↑ Numbers 31:11-12